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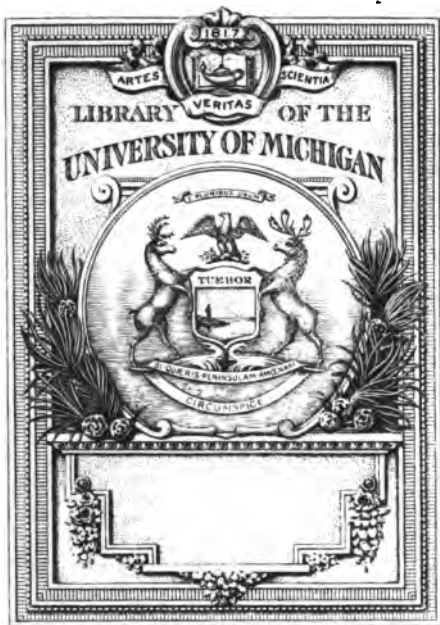
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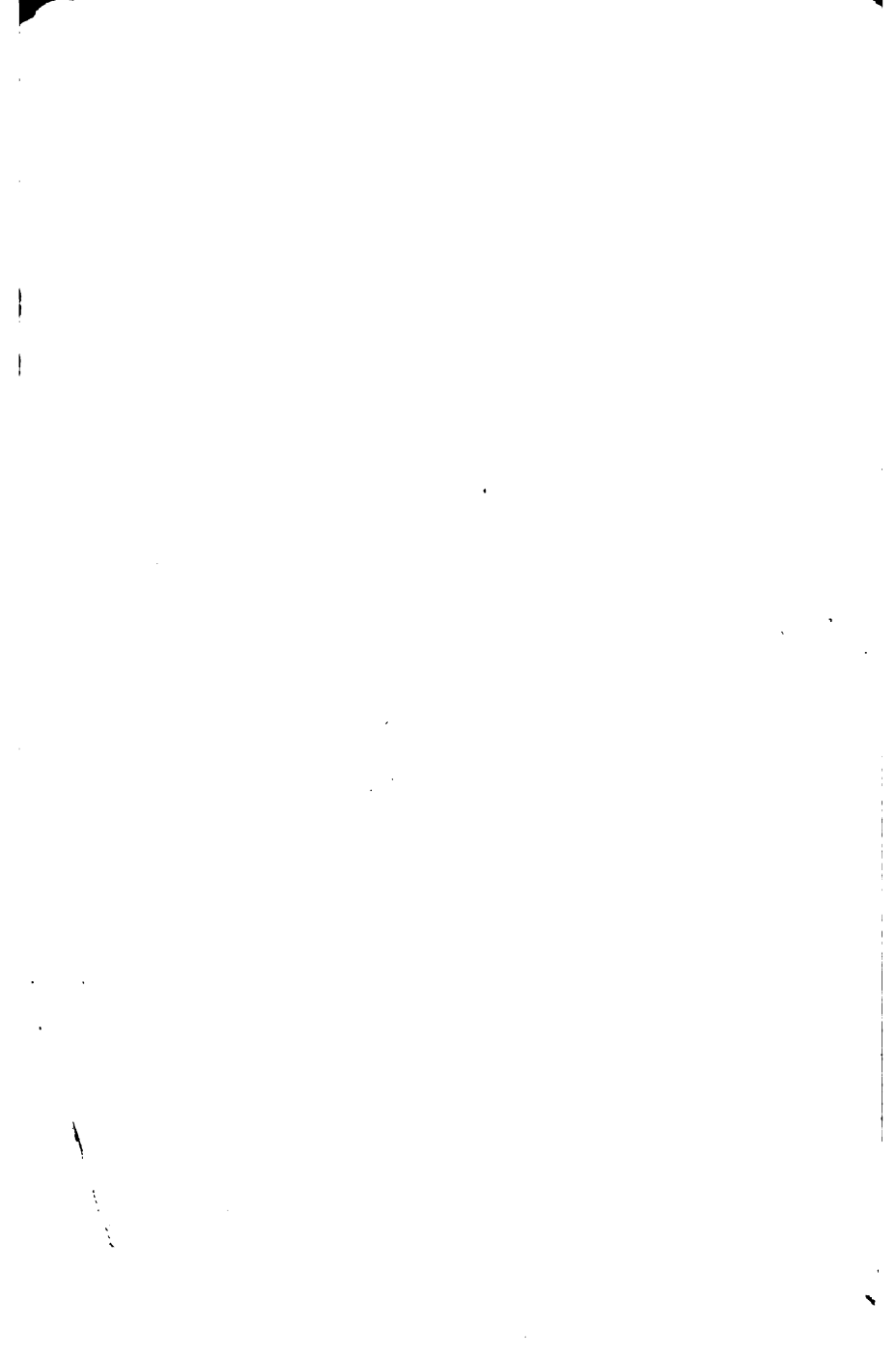
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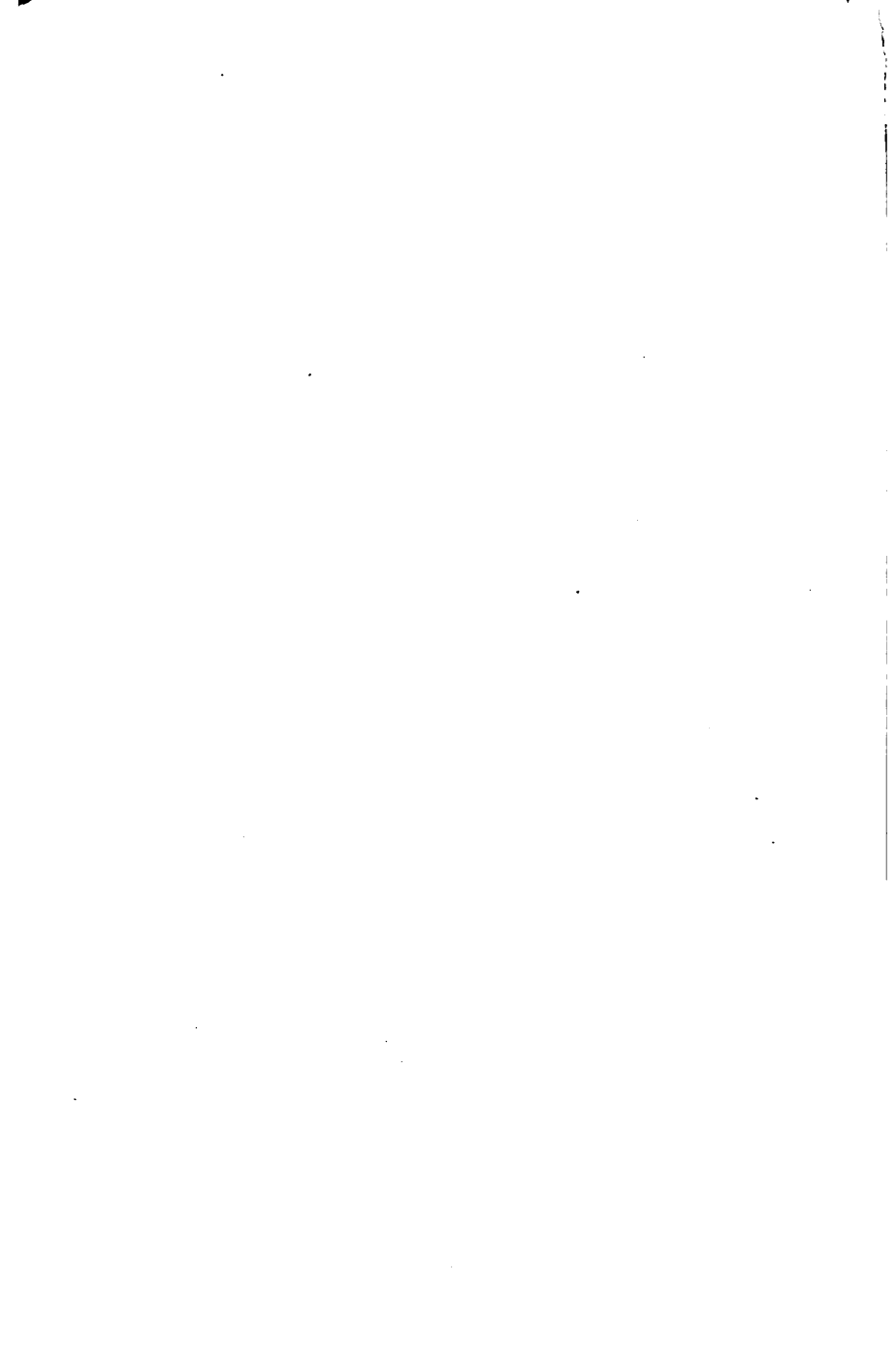
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THE LAWTON GIRL

BY HAROLD FREDERIC

In Uniform Binding. Price, \$1.50 each

IN THE SIXTIES

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THE LAWTON GIRL

SETH'S BROTHER'S WIFE

THE DAMNATION OF THERON WARE

The Lawton Girl

BY
HAROLD FREDERIC

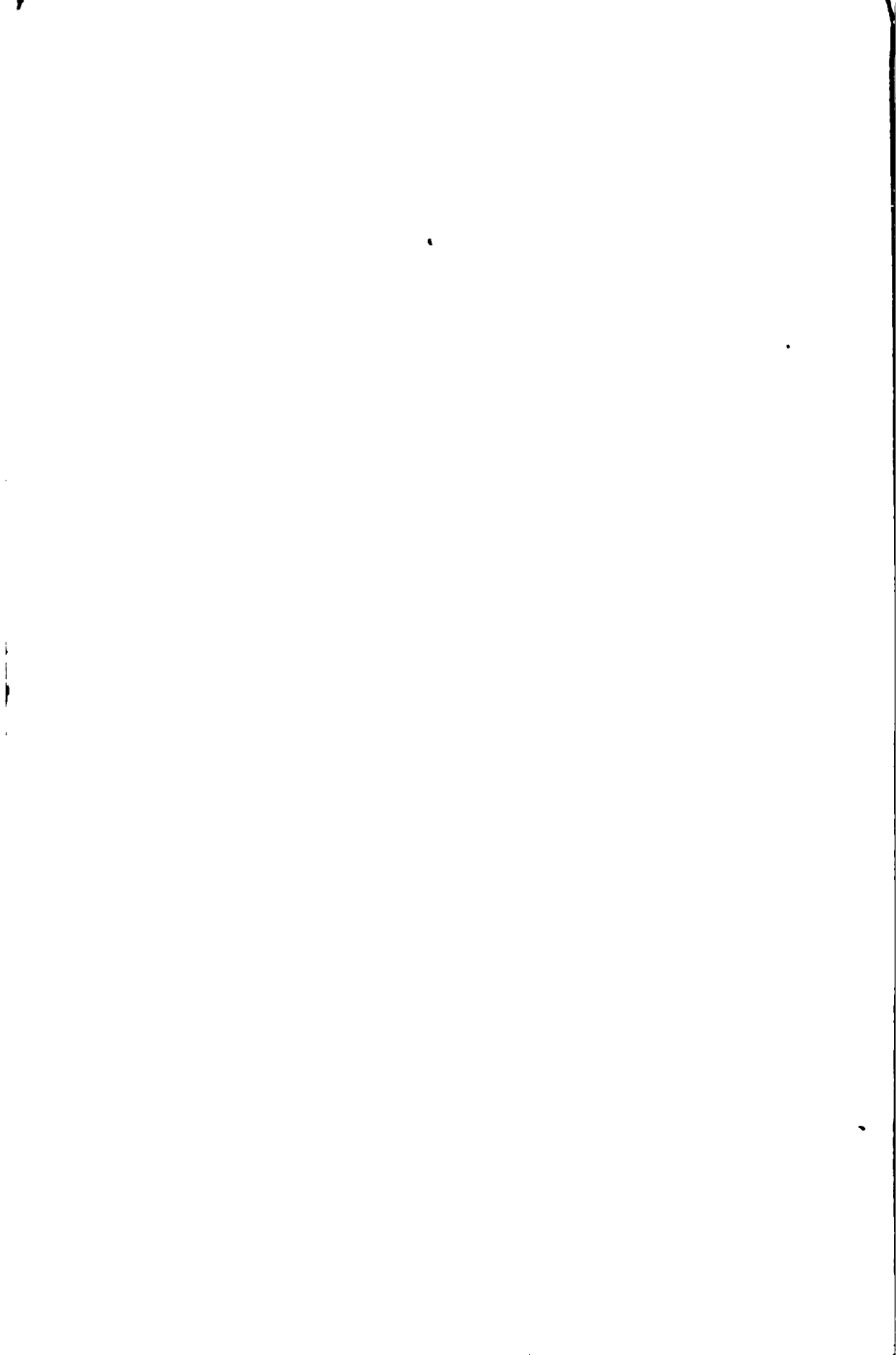
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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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**TO THE DEAREST OF OLD FRIENDS,
EDWARD ALOYSIUS TERRY**



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THE LAWTON GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

“AND YET YOU KNEW!”

“THESSALY! Ten minutes foh refreshments!” called out the brisk young colored porter, advancing up the aisle of the drawing-room car, whisk-broom in hand. “Change cahs foh Thanksgiving turkey *and* cranberry sauce,” he added, upon humorous after-thought, smiling broadly as he spoke, and chuckling to himself.

This friendly remark was addressed in confidence to a group of three persons at the forward end of the car, who began preparations for the halt as the clanking of the wheels beneath them grew more measured, and the carriage trembled and lurched under the pressure of the brakes. But the cheery grin which went with it was exclusively directed to the two ladies who rose now from their arm-chairs, and who gently relaxed their features in amused response.

Whether the porter was moved only by the comeliness of these faces and their gracious softening,

or whether he was aware that they were patrician countenances, so to speak, and belonged to Mrs. and Miss Minster, persons of vast wealth and importance and considerable stockholders in this very railroad, is not clear. But he made a great bustle over getting their parcels down from the racks overhead, and helping them to don their outer garments. He smoothed the rich fur of their sealskin cloaks with almost affectionate strokes of his coffee-colored palms, and made a pile of their belongings on the next seat with an exaggerated show of dexterity and zeal. This done, he turned for a cursory moment to the young man who constituted the third member of the group, peremptorily pulled up the collar of his overcoat to the top of his ears, and was back again with his arms full of the ladies' bundles as the train came to a stop.

"This way, ladies," he said, marching jauntily under his burden toward the door.

"I will bid you good-day, Mr. Boyce," said the elder of the women, speaking with somewhat formal politeness, but offering her hand.

"Good-day, sir," the younger said simply, with a little inclination of the head, but with no "Mr. Boyce," and no proffer of her gloved fingers.

The young man murmured "so delighted to have had the privilege" between low answering bows, and then stood watching the two fur-draped figures move to the door and disappear, with a certain blankness of expression on his face which seemed to say that he had hoped for a more cordial leave-taking. Then

he smiled with reassurance, folded up and pocketed his thin car-cap, adjusted his glossy silk hat carefully, and proceeded to tug out his own valise. It was a matter of some difficulty to get the cumbersome bag down off the high icy steps to the ground. It was even more disagreeable to carry it along when he had got it down, and after a few paces he let it fall with a grunt of vexation, and looked about him for assistance. "How much better they do these things in Europe!" was what he thought as he looked.

All day long he had been journeying over a snow-bound country—with white-capped houses, white-frozen streams, white-tufted firs, white-mantled fields and roads and hillsides, forever dodging one another in the dissolving panorama before his window. The train drawn up for the moment behind him might have come in from the North Pole, so completely laden with snow was every flat surface—of roof and beam, of platform and window-frame—presented by the dark line of massive coaches. Yet it seemed to him that there was more snow, more bleak and cheerless evidence of winter, here in his native Thessaly, than he had seen anywhere else. It was characteristic, too, he felt, that nobody should appear to care how much inconvenience this snow caused. There was but an indifferently shovelled path leading from where he stood, across the open expanse of side-tracks to the old and dingy dépôt beyond—cleared for the use of such favored passengers as might alight from the drawing-room

section of the train. Those who had arrived in the ordinary cars at the rear were left to flounder through the smoke-begrimed drifts as best they could.

The foremost of these unconsidered travellers were coming up, red and angry with the exertion of carrying their own luggage, and plunging miserably along through the great ridges of discolored snow heaped between the tracks, when Mr. Boyce's impatient eye fell upon somebody he knew.

"Hello there, Lawton!" he shouted. "Come here and help me with this infernal bag, won't you!"

The man to whom he called had been gazing down the yard at the advancing wayfarers. He looked up now, hesitated for a moment, then came forward slowly, shuffling through the snow to the path. He was a middle-aged, thin, and round-shouldered man, weak and unkempt as to face and hair and beard, with shabby clothes and no overcoat. Although he wore mittens, he still from force of habit had his hands plunged half-way into his trousers pockets. Even where it would have been easy to step over the intermittent drifts and mounds at the sides of the tracks, he shiftlessly pushed his feet through them instead.

"Hello, Hod!" he said slowly, with a kind of melancholy hesitation, "is that you?"

Young Mr. Boyce ignored the foolish question, and indicated the valise with a nod of his head.

"I wish you'd get that thing down to the house,

Ben. And take these checks for my trunks, too, will you, and see that they're brought down. Where is that expressman, anyway? Why isn't he here, on hand, attending to his business?"

"I don't know as I can, Hod," said the man without an overcoat, idly kicking into a heap of mingled cinders and snow with his wet, patched boots, and glancing uneasily down the yard. "I'm down here a-waitin'—for—that is to say, I've got somethin' else to do. Prob'ly you can get some other fellow outside the deepo."

Mr. Boyce's answer to this was to add a bright half-dollar to the brass baggage-checks he already held in his hand. The coin was on the top, and Ben Lawton could not help looking at it. The temptation was very great.

"I ought to stay here, you know," he faltered. "Fact is, honest Injun! I *got* to stay here! I'm lookin' for—somebody a-comin' in on this train."

"Well, you can look, can't you, and do this too? There's no hurry about the things. If they're home two hours hence it will be time enough."

"Yes, I know, it might be so as I could do it, later on," said Lawton, taking one of his hands from his pocket and stretching it tentatively toward the money. Then a second thought prompted him to waver, and he drew back the hand, muttering feebly: "Then, again, it might be so as I couldn't do it. You *better* get somebody else. And yet—I don't know—p'raps—"

Mr. Boyce settled the question by briskly reach-

ing down for his bag. "All right! Please yourself," he said. "I've got no more time to waste with you. I'll do it myself."

Before he had fairly lifted the valise from the ground, the irresolute Lawton made up his mind. "Put her down again, Hod," he said. "I'll manage it somehow."

He took the half-dollar in his mittened hand, and tossed it gently up and down on the striped blue and white surface of yarn. "It's the first money I've earned for over a week," he remarked, as if in self-defence.

Even as he spoke, a young woman in black who had been wandering about in the dépôt yard came running excitedly up to him. She gave a little inarticulate cry of recognition as she drew near. He turned, saw her, and in a bewildered way opened his arms. She dropped her bundles and bandbox heedlessly into the snow, and threw herself upon his breast, hiding her face on his threadbare coat, and sobbing audibly.

Mr. Boyce had been entirely unprepared for this demonstration, and looked wonderingly upon the couple who stood in the path before him. After a moment or two of silent inspection he made as if to pass them, but they did not move. The girl still hid her face, although she had ceased to weep, and Lawton bent his head down over hers, with tears in his eyes and his gaze fixed vaguely on the snow beyond her, while he tenderly patted her shoulder with the hand that did not hold the half-dollar.

"All right, then, Ben," Mr. Boyce called out. "If you'll just let me pass, I'll walk on. Have the things there by five."

At the first sound of this voice, the girl raised her head. She turned now, her tear-stained face luminous with a deep, wrathful emotion, and looked at the speaker.

The young man did not for more than an instant try to meet this glance. His cheek flushed and his eyes sought the ground. He lifted his hand with a hurried, awkward gesture toward his hat, made a hasty plunge around them through the snow, and walked swiftly away past the gate into the dépôt.

The girl's intent gaze followed the retiring Mr. Boyce until he disappeared. Then it shifted suddenly and fell upon the face of Ben Lawton, from whose embrace she had now withdrawn.

The poor man made no effort whatsoever to brave its searching and reproachful inquiry. He balanced the half-dollar on his mitten's edge, watched the exercise with a piteously futile pretence of interest, and looked as if he was about to cry.

"What 'things' were those he spoke of, father?" she asked, after a long pause.

The passengers who had temporarily left the train for the doubtful solace of the refreshment counter were beginning now to return. Some of them jostled past the couple who stood blocking the narrow path; and one of these, a stout and choleric man in a silk skull-cap and a fur-lined overcoat, brusquely kicked the big valise out of the way,

overturning it in the snow. Lawton had not found the courage necessary for a complete explanation. He bent over now, set the bag on its bottom again, and made partial answer:

"This is one of 'em."

The heavy train, snow-capped and sombre, began to draw out of the yard. The two Lawtons stood and silently watched it unfold its length—saw first the broad, plate-glass panes of the drawing-room and sleeping cars, with their luxurious shadows and glimpses of well-groomed heads and costly stuffs behind, glide slowly, sedately by; then, more rapidly, the closer-set windows of the yellow, common cars, through the steam on which visions of hats and faces dimly crowded; and last, the diminishing rear platform, with its solitary brakeman vehemently whirling the horizontal wheel of the brake—grow small, then indistinct, then vanish altogether. A sense of desertion, of having been left behind, seemed to brood over the old clapboarded *dépôt* like a cloud, darkening the ashen masses of snow round about and chilling the very air.

The daughter looked once more at her father.

"You are going to carry *his* things!" she said, with a stern, masterful inflection in her voice, and with flashing eyes.

"Hope-to-die, Jess, I tried as hard as I could to get out of it—made all sorts of excuses," Lawton pleaded, shrinking meantime from her gaze, and furtively but clumsily slipping the coin into his pocket. "But you know the kind of fellow Hod

is—" he stammered here with confusion, and made haste to add—" what I mean is—he—well, he just wouldn't take no for an answer."

She went on coldly, as if she had not heard: "You have got *his* money—I saw it—there in your hand."

"Well, I tell you what, Jess," the father answered, with an accession of boldness, "half-dollars don't grow on every bush up this way. I ain't seen one afore in a fortnight. And to-morrow's Thanksgiving, you know—and then you've come home—and what was a fellow to do?"

The girl turned, as if it were fruitless to say more. Then the necessity for relief mastered her: she faced him again, and ground the words from between her set teeth with scornful sadness:

"You take *his* money—and yet you knew!"

CHAPTER II.

CONFRONTING THE ORDEAL.

JESSICA LAWTON stood on the sidewalk outside the dépôt, and waited for the return of her father, who had gone in search of the expressman.

The street up and down which she glanced was in a sense familiar to her, for she had been born and reared on a hillside road not far away, and until her eighteenth year had beheld no finer or more important place than this Thessaly—which once had seemed so big and grand, and now, despite the obvious march of “improvement,” looked so dwarfed and countrified in its overlarge, misfitting coat of snow.

She found herself puzzled vaguely by the confusion of objects she remembered with things which appeared not at all to belong to the scene. There was the old Dearborn House, for example, on the same old corner, with its high piazza overhanging both streets, and its seedy brown clapboard sides that had needed a fresh painting as long as she could recollect—and had not got it yet. But beside it, where formerly had been a long, straggling line of decrepit sheds, was reared now a tall, narrow, flat-roofed brick building—the village fire-engine house ;

and through the half-open door, in which a man and a bull-dog stood surveying her, she could see the brassy brightness of a huge modern machine within. It seemed only yesterday that the manhood of Thessaly had rejoiced and perspired over the heavy, unwieldy wheeled pump which was dragged about with ropes and worked by means of long hand-brakes, with twelve men on a side, and a ducking from the hose for all shirkers. And here was a citified brick engine-house, and a "steamer" drawn by horses!

Everywhere, as she looked, this incongruous jumbling of the familiar and the novel forced itself upon the girl's attention. And neither the old nor the new bore on its face any welcome for her.

In a narrower and more compact street than this main thoroughfare of Thessaly, the people in view would have constituted almost a crowd. The stores all seemed to be doing a thriving business, particularly if those who lounged about looking in the windows might be counted upon presently to buy something. Both sides of the road were lined with rustic sleighs, drawn up wherever paths had been cut through the deep snow to the sidewalks; and farmers in big overcoats, comforters, and mittens were visible by scores, spreading buffalo-robcs over their horses, or getting out armfuls of turkeys and tubs of butter from the straw in the bottoms of their sleds, or stamping with their heavy boots on the walks for warmth, as they discussed prices and the relative badness of the various snow-blocked roads in the vicinity. Farther down the street a load of

hay had tipped over in the middle of the road, and the driver, an old man with a faded army-overcoat and long hair, was hurling loud imprecations at some boys who had snowballed him, and who now, from a safe distance, yelled back impolite rejoinders.

Among all who passed, Jessica caught sight of no accustomed face. In a way, indeed, they were all familiar enough: they were types in feature and voice and dress and manner of the people among whom her whole earlier life had been spent. But she knew none of them—and was at once glad of this, and very melancholy.

She had done a rash and daring thing in coming back to Dearborn County. It had seemed the right thing to do, and she had found the strength and resolution to do it. But there had been many moments of quaking trepidation during the long railroad journey from Tecumseh that day, and she was conscious now, as she looked about her, of a well-nigh complete collapse of courage. The tears would come, and she had more than once furtively to lift her handkerchief to her face.

It was not a face with which one, at first glance, would readily associate tears. The features were regularly, almost firmly cut; and the eyes—large, fine eyes though they were—had commonly a wide-awake, steady, practical look, which expressed anything rather than weakness. The effect of the countenance, as a whole, suggested an energetic, self-contained young woman, who knew her way about, who was likely to be neither cheated nor

flattered out of her rights, and who distinctly belonged to the managing division of the human race. This conception of her was aided by the erect, independent carriage of her shoulders, which made her seem taller than she really was, and by the clever simplicity of her black tailor-made jacket and dress, and her round, shapely, turban-like hat.

But if one looked closely into this face, here in the snowlight of the November afternoon, there would be found sundry lines and shadows of sensibility and of suffering which were at war with its general expression. And these, when one caught them, had an air of being new, and of not yet having had time to lay definite hold upon the face itself. They were nearer it now, perhaps, as the tears came, than they had often been before, yet even now both they and the moisture glistening on the long lashes, appeared foreign to the calm immobility of the countenance. Tears did not seem to belong there, nor smiles.

Yet a real smile did all at once move to softness the compressed lines of her lips, and bring color to her cheeks and a pleasant mellowing of glance into her eyes. She had been striving to occupy her all-too-introspective mind by reading the signs with which the house-fronts were thickly covered; and here, on a doorway close beside her, was one at sight of which her whole face brightened. And it was a charming face now—a face to remember—with intelligence and fine feeling and frank happiness in every lineament, yet with the same curious sugges-

tion, too, of the smile, like the tears, being rare and unfamiliar.

The sign was a small sheet of tin, painted in yellow letters on a black ground :

.....
REUBEN TRACY,
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR AT LAW,
Second Floor.
.....

"Oh, he is here, then ; he has come back !" she said aloud. She repeated, with an air of enjoying the sound of the words : "He has come back."

She walked up to the sign, read it over and over again, and even touched it, in a meditative way, with the tip of her gloved finger. The smile came to her face once more as she murmured : "*He* will know—he will make it easier for me."

But even as she spoke the sad look spread over her face again. She walked back to the place where she had been standing, and looked resolutely away from the sign—at the tipped-over load of hay, at the engine-house, at the sleighs passing to and fro—through eyes dimmed afresh with tears.

Thus she still stood when her father returned. The expressman who halted his bob-sleigh at the cutting in front of her, and who sat holding the reins while her father piled her valise and parcels on behind, looked her over with a half-awed, half-quiz-zical glance, and seemed a long time making up his mind to speak. Finally he said :

"How d'do? Want to ride here, on the seat, 'longside of me?"

There was an indefinable something in his tone, and in the grin that went with it, which she resented quickly.

"I had no idea of riding at all," she made answer.

Her father, who had seated himself on a trunk in the centre of the sleigh, interposed. "Why, Jess, you remember Steve, don't you?" he asked, apologetically.

The expressman and the girl looked briefly at one another, and nodded in a perfunctory manner.

Lawton went on: "He offered himself to give us a lift as far as the house. He's goin' that way—ain't you, Steve?"

The impulse was strong in Jessica to resist—precisely why she might have found it difficult to explain—but apparently there was no choice remaining to her. "Very well, then," she said, "I will sit beside you, father."

She stepped into the sleigh at this, and took her seat on the other end of the big trunk. The expressman gave a slap of the lines and a cluck to the horse, which started briskly down the wide street, the bell at its collar giving forth a sustained, cheery tinkle as they sped through the snow.

"Well, what do you think—ain't this better'n walkin'?" remarked Lawton, after a time, knocking his heels in a satisfied way against the side of the trunk.

"I felt as if the walk would do me good," she

answered, simply. Her face was impassivity itself, as she looked straight before her, over the express-man's shoulder.

Ben Lawton felt oppressed by the conviction that his daughter was annoyed. Perhaps it was because he had insisted on riding—instead of saying that he would walk too, when she had disclosed her preference. He ventured upon an explanation, stealing wistful glances at her meantime:

“You see, Jess, Dave Rantell's got a turkey-shoot on to-day, down at his place, and I kind o' thought I'd try my luck with this here half-dollar, 'fore it gets dark. The days are shortenin' so, this season o' year, that I couldn't get there without Steve give me a lift. And if I should get a turkey—why, we'll have a regular Thanksgiving dinner; and with you come home, too!”

To this she did not trust herself to make answer, but kept her face rigidly set, and her eyes fixed as if engrossed in meditation. They had passed the great iron-works on the western outskirts of the village now, and the road leading to the suburb of Burfield ran for a little through almost open country. The keener wind raised here in resistance to the rapid transit of the sleigh—no doubt it was this which brought the deep flush to her cheeks and the glistening moisture to her eyes.

They presently overtook two young men who were trudging along abreast, each in one of the tracks made by traffic, and who stepped aside to let the sleigh go by.

"Hello, Hod!" called out the expressman as he passed. "I've got your trunks. Come back for good?"

"Hello, Steve! I don't quite know yet," was the reply which came back—the latter half of it too late for the expressman's ears.

Jessica had not seen the pedestrians until the sleigh was close upon them; then, in the moment's glimpse of them vouchsafed her, she had recognized young Mr. Boyce, and, in looking away from him with swift decision, had gazed full into the eyes of his companion. This other remembered her too, it was evident, even in that brief instant of passing, for a smile of greeting was in the glance he returned, and he lifted his hat as she swept by.

This was Reuben Tracy, then! Despite his beard, he seemed scarcely to have aged in face during these last five years; but he looked straighter and stronger, and his bearing had more vigor and firmness than she remembered of him in the days when she was an irregular pupil at the little old Burfield-road school-house, and he was the teacher. She was glad that he looked so hale and healthful. And had her tell-tale face, she wondered, revealed as she passed him all the deep pleasure she felt at seeing him again—at knowing he was near? She tried to recall whether she had smiled, and could not make sure. But *he* had smiled—of that there was not a doubt; and he had known her on the instant, and had taken off his hat, not merely jerked his finger toward it. Ah, what delight there was in these thoughts!

She turned to her father, and lifting her voice above the jingle of the bell, spoke with animation :

"Tell me about the second man we just passed—Mr. Tracy. Has he been in Thessaly long, and is he doing a good business?" She added hastily, as if to forestall some possible misconception: "He used to be my school-teacher, you know."

"Guess he's gettin' on all right," replied Lawton: "I hain't heard nothin' to the contrary. He must a' been back from New York along about a year—maybe two." To her great annoyance he shouted out to the driver: "Steve, how long's Rube Tracy been back in Thessaly? You keep track o' things better'n I do."

The expressman replied over his shoulder: "Should say about a year come Christmas." Then, after a moment's pause, he transferred the reins to his other hand, twisted himself half around on his seat, and looked into Jessica's face with his earlier and offensive expression of mingled familiarity and diffidence. "He appeared to remember you: took off his hat," he said. There was an unmistakable leer on his lank countenance as he added:

"That other fellow was Hod Boyce, the General's son, you know—just come back from the old country."

"Yes, I know!" she made answer curtly, and turned away from him.

During what remained of the journey she preserved silence, keeping her gaze steadily fixed on the drifted fields beyond the fence in front of her

and thinking about these two young men—at first with infinite bitterness and loathing of the one, and then, for a longer time, and with a soft, half-sadened pleasure, of the other.

It was passing strange that she should find herself here at all—here in this village which for years at a time she had sworn never to see again. But, when she thought of it, it seemed still more remarkable that at the very outset she should see, walking together, the two men whom memory most distinctly associated with her old life here as a girl. She had supposed them both—her good and her evil genius—to be far away; in all her inchoate speculations about how she should meet various people, no idea of encountering either of these had risen in her mind. Yet here they were—and walking together!

Their conjunction disturbed and vaguely troubled her. She tried over and over again to reassure herself by saying that it was a mere accident; of course they had been acquainted with each other for years, and they had happened to meet, and what more natural than that they should walk on side by side? And yet it somehow seemed wrong.

Reuben Tracy was the best man she had ever known. Poor girl—so grievous had been her share of life's lessons that she really thought of him as the only good man she had ever known. In all the years of her girlhood—unhappy, wearied, and mutinous, with squalid misery at home, and no respite from it possible outside which, looked back upon at this distance, did not seem equally coarse and repel-

lent—there had been but this solitary gleam of light, the friendship of Reuben Tracy. Striving now to recall the forms in which this friendship had been manifested, she was conscious that there was not much to remember. He had simply impressed her as a wise and unselfish friend—that was all. The example of kindness, gentleness, of patient industry which he had set before her in the rude, bare-walled little school-room, and which she felt now had made a deep and lasting impression on her, had been set for all the rest as well. If sometimes he had seemed to like her better than the other girls, his preference was of a silent, delicate, unexpressed sort—as if prompted solely by acquaintance with her greater need for sympathy. Without proffers of aid, almost without words, he had made her comprehend that, if evil fell upon her, the truest and most loyal help and counsel in all the world could be had from him for the asking.

The evil had fallen, in one massed, cruel, stunning stroke, and she had staggered blindly away—away anywhere, anyhow, to any fate. Almost her instincts had persuaded her to go to him; but he was a young man, only a few years her senior—and she had gone away without seeing him. But she had carried into the melancholy, bitter *exile* a strange sense of gratitude, if so it may be called, to Reuben Tracy for the compassionate aid he would have extended, had he known; and she said to herself now, in her heart of hearts, that it was this good feeling which had remained like a leaven of hope in

her nature, and had made it possible for her at last, by its mysterious and beneficent workings, to come out into the open air again and turn her face toward the sunlight.

And he had taken off his hat to her !

The very thought newly nerved her for the ordeal which she had proposed to herself—the task of bearing, here in the daily presence of those among whom she had been reared, the burden of a hopelessly discredited life.

CHAPTER III.

YOUNG MR. BOYCE'S MEDITATIONS.

THE changes in Thessaly's external appearance did not particularly impress young Mr. Horace Boyce as he walked down the main street in the direction of his father's house. For one thing, he had been here for a fortnight only a few months before, upon his return from Europe, and had had pointed out to him all of novelty that his native village offered. And again, nearly four years of acquaintance with the chief capitals of the Old World had so dulled his vision, so to speak, that it was no longer alert to detect the presence of new engine-houses and brick stores in the place of earlier and less imposing structures. To be accurate, he did not think much about Thessaly, one way or the other. So long as his walk led him along the busier part of the thoroughfare, his attention was fully occupied by encounters and the exchange of greetings with old school-fellows and neighbors, who all seemed glad to see him home again; and when he had passed the last store on the street, and had of necessity exchanged the sidewalk for one of the two deep-beaten tracks in the centre of the drifted road, his thoughts were still upon a more engrossing sub-

ject than the growth and prosperity of any North American town.

They were pleasant thoughts, though, as any one might read in a glance at his smooth-shaven, handsome face, with its satisfied half smile and its bold, confident expression of eyes. He stopped once in his rapid walk and stood for a minute or two in silent contemplation, just before he reached the open stretch of country which lay like a wedge between the two halves of the village. The white surface in front of him was strewn here with dry boughs and twigs, broken from the elms above by the weight of the recent snowfall. Beyond the fence some boys with comforters tied about their ears were skating on a pond in the fields. Mr. Boyce looked over these to the darkened middle-distance of the wintry picture, where rose the grimy bulk and tall smoke-belching chimneys of the Minster iron-works. He seemed to find exhilaration in his long, intent gaze at these solid evidences of activity and wealth, for he filled his lungs with a deep, contented draught of the nipping air when he finally turned and resumed his walk, swinging his shoulders and lightly tapping the crusted snowbanks at his side with his stick as he stepped briskly forward.

The Minster iron-works were undoubtedly worth thinking about, and all the more so because they were not new. During all the dozen or more years of their existence they had never once been out of blast. At seasons of extreme depression in the market, when even Pennsylvania was idle and the

poor smelters of St. Louis and Chicago could scarcely remember when they had been last employed, these chimneys upon which he had just looked had never ceased for a day to hurl their black clouds into the face of the sky. They had been built by one of the cleverest and most daring of all the strong men whom that section had produced—the late Stephen Minster. It was he who had seen in the hills close about the choicest combination of ores to be found in the whole North; it was he who had brought in the capital to erect and operate the works, who had organized and controlled the enterprise by which a direct road to the coal-fields was opened, and who, in affording employment to thousands and good investments to scores, had not failed to himself amass a colossal fortune. He had been dead now nearly three years, but the amount of his wealth, left in its entirety to his family, was still a matter of conjecture. Popular speculation upon this point had but a solitary clew with which to work. In a contest which arose a year before his death, over the control of the Northern Union Telegraph Company, he had sent down proxies representing a clear six hundred thousand dollars' worth of shares. With this as a basis for calculation, curious people had arrived at a shrewd estimate of his total fortune as ranging somewhere between two and three millions of dollars.

Stephen Minster had died very suddenly, and had been sincerely mourned by a community which owed him nothing but good-will, and could remem-

ber no single lapse from honesty or kindliness in his whole unostentatious, useful career. It was true that the absence of public-spirited bequests in his will created for the moment a sense of disappointment; but the explanation quickly set afoot—that he had not foreseen an early death, and had postponed to declining years, which, alas! never came, the task of apportioning a moiety of his millions among deserving charities—was plausible enough to be received everywhere. By virtue of a testament executed two years before—immediately after the not altogether edifying death of his only son—all his vast property devolved upon Mrs. Minster, and her two daughters, Kate and Ethel. Every unmarried man in Thessaly—and perhaps, with a certain vague repining, here and there one of the married men too—remembered all these facts each time he passed the home of the Minsters on the Seminary road, and looked over the low wall of masonry at the close-trimmed lawn, the costly fountain, the gravelled carriage-drive, and the great house standing back and aloof in stately seclusion among the trees and the rose-bushes.

Most of these facts were familiar as well to Mr. Horace Boyce. As he strode along, filliping the snow with his cane and humming to himself, he mentally embellished them with certain deductions drawn from information gathered during the journey by rail from New York. The Miss Kate Minster whom he had met was the central figure in his meditations, as indeed she was the important per-

sonage in her family. The mother had impressed him as an amiable and somewhat limited woman, without much force of character; the younger daughter, Ethel, he remembered dimly, as a delicate and under-sized girl who was generally kept home from school by reason of ill-health, and it was evident from such remarks as the two ladies dropped that she was still something of an invalid. But it was clear that Miss Kate lacked neither moral nor bodily strength.

He was quite frank with himself in thinking that, apart from all questions of money, she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. It was an added charm that her beauty fitted so perfectly the idea of great wealth. She might have been the daughter of the millions themselves, so tall and self-contained and regal a creature was she, with the firm, dark face of her father reproduced in feminine grace and delicacy of outline; with a skin as of an Oriental queen, softly luxuriant in texture and in its melting of creamy and damask and deepening olive hues; and with large, richly brown, deep-fringed eyes which looked proudly and steadily on all the world, young men included. These fine orbs were her most obvious physical inheritance from her father. The expression "the Minster eyes," would convey as distinct an impression to the brain of the average Thessalian as if one had said "the Minster iron-works." The great founder of the millions, Stephen Minster, had had them, and they were the notable feature of even his im-

pressive face. The son who was dead, Stephen junior, had also had them, as Horace now recalled to mind; but set in his weak head they had seemed to lose significance, and had been, in truth, very generally in his latter years dimmed and opacated by the effects of dissipation. The pale, sweet-faced little Ethel Minster, as he remembered her, had them as well, although with her they were almost hazel in color, and produced a timid, mournful effect. But to no other face in the entire family gallery did they seem to so wholly belong of right as to the countenance of Miss Kate.

Young Mr. Boyce's thoughts wandered easily from the image of the heiress to the less tangible question of her disposition, and, more particularly, of her attitude toward him. There were obscurities here over which a less sanguine young man might have bitten his lips. He had ventured upon recalling himself to mother and daughter very soon after the train left New York, and they had not shown any shadow of annoyance when he took a vacant chair opposite them and began a conversation which lasted, such as it was, through all the long journey. But now that he came to think of it, his share in that conversation had been not only the proverbial lion's, but more nearly that of a whole zoölogical garden. Mrs. Minster had not affected any especial reserve; it was probable that she was by nature a listener rather than a talker, for she had asked him numerous questions about himself and about Europe. As for Miss Minster, he could scarcely recall

anything she had said, what time she was looking at him instead of at her book. And he had not always been strictly comfortable under this look. There had been nothing unfriendly in it, it was true, nor could it occur to anybody to suspect in it a lack of comprehension or of interest. In fact, he said to himself, it was eloquent with both. The trouble was, as he uneasily attempted to define it, that she seemed to comprehend too much. Still, after all, he had said nothing to which she could take the faintest exception, and, if she was the intelligent woman he took her to be, there must have been a good deal in his talk to entertain her.

Even a less felicitous phrase-maker than Horace Boyce could have manufactured pleasant small-talk out of such experiences as his had been. The only son of a well-to-do and important man in Thessaly, he had had the further advantage of inheriting some twenty thousand dollars upon attaining his majority, and after finishing his course at college had betaken himself to Europe to pursue more recondite studies there, both in and out of his chosen profession of the law. The fact that he had devoted most of his attention to the gleaning of knowledge lying beyond the technical pale of the law did not detract from the interesting quality of his observations. Besides listening to lectures at Heidelberg, he had listened to the orchestra swaying in unison under the baton of Strauss at Vienna, and to a good many other things in Pesth and Paris and Brussels and London, a large number of which could with propriety be

described in polite conversation. And he flattered himself that he had discoursed upon these things rather cleverly, skirting delicate points with neatness, and bringing in effective little descriptions and humorous characterizations in quite a natural way.

Moreover, he said to himself, it had been his privilege to see America in perspective—to stand upon a distant eminence, as it were, and look the whole country over, by and large, at a glance. This had enabled him on his return to discover the whimsical aspect of a good many things which the stay-at-home natives took with all seriousness. He had indicated some of these to the two ladies with a light and amiably bantering touch, and with a consciousness that he was opening up novel ground to both his hearers.

Still—he wondered if Miss Minster had really liked it. Could it be possible that she belonged to that thin-skinned class of Americans who cannot brook any comment upon anything in or of their country that is not wholly eulogistic—who resent even the most harmless and obvious pleasantry pointed at a cis-Atlantic institution? He decided this promptly in the negative. He had met such people, but he could not associate them in his mind with the idea of great wealth. And Miss Minster was rich—incredibly rich. No doubt she was thinking, even while she listened to him, of the time when she too should go to Europe, and dazzle its golden youth with her beauty and her millions. Now that he thought of it, he had seen much that

same look before on the face of an American heiress, on her return from a London "five-o'clock tea," at which she had met an eligible marquis.

Could it be that her thoughts ran, instead, upon an eligible somebody nearer home? He devoted himself at this to canvassing the chances of her fancy being already fixed. It was of little importance that nothing in their conversation suggested this, because it was a subject to which they naturally would not have alluded. Yet he recalled that Mrs. Minster had spoken of their great seclusion more than once. He had gathered, moreover, that they knew very few people in New York City, and that they had little acquaintance with the section of its population which is colloquially known as "society." This looked mightily like a clear field.

Young Mr. Boyce stopped to thrust his cane under a twisted branch which lay on the snow, and toss it high over the fence, when he reached this stage of his meditations. His squared, erect shoulders took on a more buoyant swing than ever as he resumed his walk. A clear field, indeed!

And now as to the problem of proceeding to occupy that field. Where was there a gap in the wall? Millions were not to be approached and gained by simple and primitive methods, as one knocks apples off an overhanging bough with a fence-rail. Strategy and finesse of the first order were required. Without doubt there was an elaborate system of defences reared around this girl of girls. Mrs. Minster's reference to seclusion might have

itself been a warning that they lived inside a fort, and were as ready to train a gun on him as on anybody else. Battlements of this sort had been stormed time and time again, no doubt; human history was full of such instances. But Mr. Boyce's tastes were not for violent or desperate adventures. To go over a parapet with one's sword in one's teeth, in deadly peril and tempestuous triumph, might suit his father the General: for his own part, it seemed more sagacious and indubitably safer to tunnel under the works, and emerge on the inside at the proper psychological moment to be welcomed as a friend and adviser.

Adviser! Who was their lawyer? The young man cast up in his mind the list of Thessaly's legal practitioners, as far as he could remember them. It seemed most probable that Benoni Clarke, the ex-district-attorney, would have the Minster business, if for no other reason than that he needed it less than the rest did. But Mr. Clarke was getting old, and was in feeble health as well. Perhaps he would be glad to have a young, active, and able partner, who had had the advantage of European study. Or it might be—who could tell?—that the young man with the European education could go in on his own account, and by sheer weight of cleverness, energy, and superior social address win over the Minster business. What unlimited opportunities such a post would afford him! Not only would he be the only young man in Thessaly who had been outside of his own country, the best talker, the best-informed man,

the best-mannered man of the place—but he would be able to exhibit all these excellences from the favored vantage-ground of an intimate, confidential relation. The very thought was intoxicating.

Mr. Horace Boyce was so pre-occupied with these pleasing meditations that he overtook a man walking in the other track, and had nearly passed him, before something familiar in the figure arrested his attention. He turned, and recognized an old school-mate whom he had not seen for years, and had not expected to find in Thessaly.

"Why—Reuben Tracy, as I live!" he exclaimed, cordially. "So you're back again, eh? On a visit to your folks?"

The other shook hands with him. "No," he made answer. "I've had an office here for nearly a year. You are looking well. I'm glad to see you again. Have you come back for good?"

"Yes. That's all settled," replied Mr. Horace, without a moment's hesitation.

CHAPTER IV.

REUBEN TRACY.

THE two young men walked along together, separated by the ridge of snow between the tracks. They had never been more than friendly acquaintances, and they talked now of indifferent topics—of the grim climatic freak which had turned late November into mid-winter, of the results of the recent elections, and then of English weather and politics as contrasted with ours. It was a desultory enough conversation, for each had been absorbed in his own mind by thoughts a thousand leagues away from snowfalls and partisan strife, and the transition back to amiable commonplaces was not easy.

The music of a sleigh-bell, which for some time had been increasing in volume behind them, swelled suddenly into a shrill-voiced warning close at their backs, and they stepped aside into the snow to let the conveyance pass. It was then that the expressman called out his cheery greeting, and that Reuben lifted his hat.

As the sleigh grew small in the near distance, Reuben turned to his companion. "I notice that you told him you weren't quite sure about staying

here for good," he remarked. "Perhaps I was mistaken—I understood you to say a few minutes ago that it was all settled."

Horace was not to be embarrassed by so slight a discrepancy as this—although for the instant the reappearance of Jessica had sent his wits tripping—and he was ready with a glib explanation.

"What I meant was that I am quite settled in my desire to stay here. But of course there is just a chance that there may be no opening, and I don't want to prematurely advertise what may turn out a failure. By the way, wasn't that that Lawton girl?"

"Yes—Ben Lawton's oldest daughter."

Reuben's tone had a slow preciseness in it which caused Horace to glance closely at him, and wonder if it were possible that it masked some ulterior meaning. Then he reflected that Reuben had always taken serious views of things, and talked in that grave, measured way, and that this was probably a mere mannerism. So he continued, with a careless voice:

"I haven't seen her in years—should scarcely have known her. Isn't it a little queer, her coming back?"

Reuben Tracy was a big man, with heavy shoulders, a large, impassive countenance, and an air which to the stranger suggested lethargy. It was his turn to look at Horace now, and he did so with a deliberate, steady gaze, to which the wide space between his eyes and the total absence of lines at

the meeting of his brows lent almost the effect of a stare. When he had finished this inspection of his companion's face, he asked simply :

"Why?"

"Well, of course, I have only heard it from others—but there seems to be no question about it—that she—"

"That she has been a sadly unfortunate and wretched girl," interposed Reuben, finishing the sentence over which the other hesitated. "No, you are right. There *is* no question about that—no question whatever."

"Well, that is why I spoke as I did—why I am surprised at seeing her here again. Weren't you yourself surprised?"

"No, I knew that she was coming. I have a letter telling me the train she would arrive by."

"Oh!"

The two walked on in silence for a minute or two. Then Horace said, with a fine assumption of good feeling and honest regret:

"I spoke thoughtlessly, old fellow; of course I couldn't know that you were interested in—in the matter. I truly hope I didn't say anything to wound your feelings."

"Not at all," replied Reuben. "How should you? What you said is what everybody will say—must say. Besides, my feelings are of no interest whatever, so far as this affair is concerned. It is her feelings that I am thinking of; and the more I think—well, the truth is, I am completely puzzled.

I have never in all my experience been so wholly at sea."

Manifestly Horace could do nothing at this juncture but look his sympathy. To ask any question might have been to learn nothing. But his curiosity was so great that he almost breathed a sigh of relief when Reuben spoke again, even though the query he put had its disconcerting side:

"I daresay you never knew much about her before she left Thessaly?"

"I knew her by sight, of course, just as a village boy knows everybody. I take it you did know her. I can remember that she was a pretty girl."

If there was an underlying hint in this conjunction of sentences, it missed Reuben's perception utterly. He replied in a grave tone:

"She was in my school, up at the Burfield. And if you had asked me in those days to name the best-hearted girl, the brightest girl, the one who in all the classes had the making of the best woman in her, I don't doubt that I should have pointed to her. That is what makes the thing so inexpressibly sad to me now; and, what is more, I can't in the least see my way."

"Your way to what?"

"Why, to helping her, of course. She has undertaken something that frightens me when I think of it. This is the point: She has made up her mind to come back here, earn her own living decently, face the past out and live it down here among those who know that past best."

"That's a resolution that will last about three weeks."

"No, I think she is determined enough. But I fear that she cruelly underestimates the difficulties of her task. To me it looks hopeless, and I've thought it over pretty steadily the last few days."

"Pardon my asking you," said Horace, "but you have confided thus far in me—what the deuce have you got to do with either her success or her failure?"

"I've told you that I was her teacher," answered Reuben, still with the slow, grave voice. "That in itself would give me an interest in her. But there has been a definite claim made on me in her behalf. You remember Seth Fairchild, don't you?"

"Perfectly. He edits a paper down in Tecumseh, doesn't he? He did, I know, when I went abroad."

"Yes. Well, his wife—who was his cousin, Annie Fairchild, and who took the Burfield school after I left it to study law—she happens to be an angel. She is the sort of woman who, when you know her, enables you to understand all the exalted and sublime things that have ever been written about her sex. Well, a year or so after she married Seth and went to live in Tecumseh, she came to hear about poor Jessica Lawton, and her woman's heart prompted her to hunt the girl up and give her a chance for her life. I don't know much about what followed—this all happened a good many months ago—but I get a letter now from Seth, telling me that the girl is resolved to come home,

and that his wife wants me to do all I can to help her."

"Well, that's what I call letting a friend in for a particularly nice thing."

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," said Reuben; "I shall be only too glad if I can serve the poor girl. But how to do it—that's what troubles me."

"Her project is a crazy one, to begin with. I wonder that sane people like the Fairchilds should have encouraged it."

"I don't think they did. My impression is that they regarded it as unwise and tried to dissuade her from it. Seth doesn't write as if he thought she would succeed."

"No, I shouldn't say there was much danger of it. She will be back again in Tecumseh before Christmas." After a pause Horace added, in a confidential way: "It's none of my business, old fellow; but if I were you I'd be careful how I acted in this matter. You can't afford to be mixed up with her in the eyes of the people here. Of course your motives are admirable, but you know what an overgrown village is for gossip. You won't be credited with good intentions or any disinterestedness, believe me."

This seemed to be a new view of the situation to Reuben. He made no immediate answer, but walked along with his gaze bent on the track before him and his hands behind his back. At last he said, with an air of speaking to himself:

"But if one does mean well and is perfectly clear

about it in his own mind, how far ought he to allow his course to be altered by the possible misconceptions of others? That opens up a big question, doesn't it?"

"But you have said that you were not clear about it—that you were all at sea."

"As to means, yes; but not as to motives."

"Nobody but you will make the distinction. And you have your practice to consider—the confidence of your clients. Fancy the effect it will have on them—your turning up as the chief friend and patron of a—of the Lawton girl! You can't afford it."

Reuben looked at his companion again with the same calm, impassive gaze. Then he said slowly: "I can see how the matter presents itself to you. I had thought first of going to the dépôt to meet her; but, on consideration, it seemed better to wait and have a talk with her after she had seen her family. I am going out to their place now."

The tone in which this announcement was made served to change the topic of conversation. The talk became general again, and Horace turned it upon the subject of the number of lawyers in town, their relative prosperity and value, and the local condition of legal business. He found that he was right in guessing that Mr. Clarke enjoyed Thessaly's share of the business arising from the Minster iron-works, and that this share was more important than formerly, when all important affairs were in the hands of a New York firm. He was interested, too, in what Reuben Tracy revealed about his own practice.

"Oh, I have nothing to complain of," Reuben said, in response to a question. "It is a good thing to be kept steadily at work—good for a man's mind as well as for his pocket. Latterly I have had almost too much to attend to, since the railroad business on this division was put in my charge; and I grumble to myself sometimes over getting so little spare time for reading and for other things I should like to attempt. I suppose a good many of the young lawyers here would call that an ungrateful frame of mind. Some of them have a pretty hard time of it, I am afraid. Occasionally I can put some work in their way; but it isn't easy, because clients seem to resent having their business handled by unsuccessful men. That would be an interesting thing to trace, wouldn't it?—the law of the human mind which prompts people to boost a man as soon as he has shown that he can climb without help, and to pull down those who could climb well enough with a little assistance."

"So you think there isn't much chance for still another young lawyer to enter the field here?" queried Horace, bringing the discussion back to concrete matters.

"Oh, that's another thing," replied Reuben. "There is no earthly reason why you shouldn't try. There are too many lawyers here, it is true, but then I suppose there are too many lawyers everywhere—except heaven. A certain limited proportion of them always prosper—the rest don't. It depends upon yourself which class you will be in. Go ahead,

and if I can help you in any way I shall be very glad."

"You're kind, I'm sure. But, you know, it won't be as if I came a stranger to the place," said Horace. "My father's social connections will help me a good deal"—Horace thought he noted a certain incredulous gesture by his companion here, and wondered at it, but went on—"and then my having studied in Europe ought to count. I have another advantage, too, in being on very friendly terms with Mrs. and Miss Minster. I rode up with them from New York to-day, and we had a long talk. I don't want anything said about it yet, but it looks mightily as if I were to get the whole law business of the iron-works and of their property in general."

Young Mr. Boyce did not wince or change color under the meditative gaze with which Reuben regarded him upon hearing this; but he was conscious of discomfort, and he said to himself that his companion's way of staring like an introspective ox at people was unpleasant.

"That would be a tremendous start for you," remarked Reuben at last. "I hope you won't be disappointed in it."

"It seems a tolerably safe prospect," answered Horace, lightly. "You say that you're over-worked."

"Not quite that, but I don't get as much time as I should like for outside matters. I want to go on the school board here, for example—I see ever so many features of the system which seem to me

to be flaws, and which I should like to help remedy—but I can't spare the time. And then there is the condition of the poor people in the quarter grown up around the iron-works and the factories, and the lack of a good library, and the saloon question, and the way in which the young men and boys of the village spend their evenings, and so on. These are the things I am really interested in; and instead of them I have to devote all my energies to deeds and mortgages and specifications for trestle-works. That's what I meant."

"Why don't you take in a partner? That would relieve you of a good deal of the routine."

"Do you know, I've thought of that more than once lately. I daresay that if the right sort of a young man had been at hand, the idea would have attracted me long ago. But, to tell the truth, there isn't anybody in Thessaly who meets precisely my idea of a partner—whom I quite feel like taking into my office family, so to speak."

"Perhaps I may want to talk with you again on this point," said Horace.

To this Reuben made no reply, and the two walked on for a few moments in silence.

They were approaching a big, ungainly, shabby-looking structure, which presented a receding roof, a row of windows with small, old-fashioned panes of glass, and a broad, rickety veranda sprawling the whole width of its front, to the highway on their left. This had once been a rural wayside tavern, but now, by the encircling growth of the village, it had

taken on a hybrid character, and managed to combine in a very complete way the coarse demerits of a town saloon with the evil license of a suburban dive. Its location rendered it independent of most of the restrictions which the village authorities were able to enforce in Thessaly itself, and this freedom from restraint attracted the dissipated imagination of town and country alike. It was Dave Rantell's place, and being known far and wide as the most objectionable resort in Dearborn County, was in reality much worse than its reputation.

The open sheds at the side of the tavern were filled with horses and sleighs, and others were ranged along at the several posts by the roadside in front—these latter including some smart city cutters, and even a landau on runners. From the farther side of the house came, at brief intervals, the sharp report of rifle-shots, rising loud above the indistinct murmuring of a crowd's conversation.

"It must be a turkey-shoot," said Reuben. "This man Rantell has them every year at Thanksgiving and Christmas," he added, as they came in view of the scene beyond the tavern. "There! Have you seen anything in Europe like that?" Let it be stated without delay that there was no trace of patriotic pride in his tone.

The wide gate of the tavern yard was open, and the path through it had been trampled smooth by many feet. In the yard just beyond were clustered some forty or fifty men, standing about in the snow, and with their backs to the road. Away in the

distance, and to the right, were visible two or three slouching figures of men. Traversing laterally and leftward the broad, unbroken field of snow, the eye caught a small, dark object on the great white sheet ; if the vision was clear and far-sighted, a closer study would reveal this to be a bird standing alone in the waste of whiteness, tied by the leg to a stake near by, and waiting to be shot at. The attention of every man in the throng was riveted on this remote and solitary fowl. There was a deep hush for a fraction of a second after each shot. Then the turkey either hopped to one side, which meant that the bullet had gone whistling past, or sank to the ground after a brief wild fluttering of wings. In the former case, another loaded rifle was handed out, and suspense began again ; in the latter event, there ensued a short intermission devoted to beverages and badinage, the while a boy started across the fields toward the throng with the dead turkey, and the distant slouching figures busied themselves in tying up a new feathered target.

"No, it isn't what you would call elevating, is it?" said Horace, as the two stood looking over the fence upon the crowd. "Still, it has its interest as a national product. I've seen dog-fights and cock-mains in England attended by whole thousands of men, that were ever so much worse than this. If you think of it, this isn't particularly brutal, as such sports go."

"But what puzzles me is that men should like such sports at all," said Reuben.

"At any rate," replied Horace, "we're better off in that respect than the English are. The massacre of rats in a pit is a thing that you can get an assemblage of nobility, and even royalty, for, over there. Now, that isn't even relatively true here. Take this turkey-shoot of Rantell's, for example. You won't find any gentlemen here; that is, anybody who sets up to be a gentleman in either the English or the American sense of the word."

As if in ironical answer, a sharp, strident voice rose above the vague babble of the throng inside the yard, and its accents reached the two young men with painful distinctness:

"I'll bet five dollars that General Boyce kills his six birds in ten shots—bad cartridges barred!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TURKEY-SHOOT.

THE compassionate Reuben was quick to feel the humiliation with which this brawling announcement of the General's presence must cover the General's son. It had been apparent to him before that Horace would have to considerably revise the boyish estimate of his father's position and importance which he brought back with him from Europe. But it was cruel to have the work of disillusion begun in this rude, blunt form. He tried to soften the effect of the blow.

"It isn't as bad as all that," he said, tacitly ignoring what they had just heard. "No doubt some rough people do come to these gatherings; but, on the other hand, if a man is fond of shooting, why, don't you see, this furnishes him with the best kind of test of his skill. Really, there is no reason why he shouldn't come—and—besides—"

Reuben was not clever at saying things he did not wholly mean, and his good-natured attempt to gloss over the facts came to an abrupt halt from sheer lack of ideas.

"I suppose I shall have to learn to be a Thessalian all over again," said Horace. "If you don't

mind, we'll go in. It's just as well to see the thing."

Suiting the action to the word, he moved toward the gate. Reuben hesitated for a moment, and then, with an "All right—for a few minutes"—followed him into the yard. The two young men stood upon the outskirts of the crowd for a time, and then, as opportunity favored, edged their way through until they were a part of the inner half-ring around a table, upon which were rifles, cartridges, cleaning rags, a bottle and some tumblers. At their feet, under and about the table, lay several piles of turkeys. The largest of these heaps, containing some dozen birds, was, as they were furtively informed by a small boy, the property of the "General."

This gentleman, who stood well to the front of the table, might be pardoned for not turning around to note the presence of new-comers, since he himself had some money wagered on his work. He had on the instant fired his third shot, and stood with the smoking gun lowered, and his eyes fixed on the target in concentrated expectancy. The turkey made a movement and somebody called out "hit!" But the General's keen vision told him better. "No, it was a line shot," he said, "a foot too high." He kept his gaze still fixed on the remote object, mechanically taking the fresh gun which was handed to him, but not immediately raising it to his shoulder.

General Sylvanus—familiarily called "Vane"—Boyce was now close upon sixty, of middle height and

a thick and portly figure, and with perfectly white, close-cropped hair and mustache. His face had in its day boasted both regular, well-cut features and a clear complexion. But the skin was now of one uniform florid tint, even to the back of his neck, and the outlines of the profile were blurred and fattened. His gray eyes, as they swept the field of snow, had still their old, sharp, commanding glance, but they looked out from red and puffy lids.

Just as he lifted his gun, an interested bystander professed to discover Horace for the first time, and called out exuberantly: "Why, hello, Hod! I say, 'Vane,' here's your boy Hod!"

"Oh, here, fair play!" shouted some of the General's backers; "you mustn't try that on—spoiling his aim in that way." Their solicitude was uncalled for.

"Damn my boy Hod, and you too!" remarked the General calmly, raising his rifle with an uninterrupted movement, levelling it with deliberation, firing, and killing his bird.

Amid the hum of conversation which arose at this, the General turned, laid his gun down, and stepped across the space to where Horace and Reuben stood.

"Well, my lad," he said heartily, shaking his son's hand, "I'm glad to see you back. I'd have been at the dépôt to meet you, only I had this match on with Blodgett, and the money was up. I hope you didn't mind my damning you just now—I daresay I haven't enough influence to have it do you much

harm—and it was Grigg's scheme to rattle my nerve just as I was going to shoot. How are you, anyway? How de do, Tracy? What'll you both drink? This is rye whiskey here, but they'll bring out anything else you want."

"I'll take a mouthful of this," said Horace; "hold on, not so much." He poured back some of the generous portion which had been given him, and touched glasses with his father.

"You're sure you won't have anything, Tracy?" said the General. "No? You don't know what's good for you. Standing around in the cold here, a man needs something."

"But I'm not going to stand around in the cold," answered Reuben with a half-smile. "I must be going on in a moment or two."

"Don't go yet," said the General, cheerily, as he put down his glass and took up the gun. "Wait and see me shoot my score. I've got the range now."

"You've got to kill every bird but one, now, General," said one of his friends, in admonition.

"All right; don't be afraid," replied the champion, in a confident tone.

But it turned out not to be all right. The seventh shot was a miss, and so was the tenth, upon which, as the final and conclusive one, great interest hung. Some of those who had lost money by reason of their faith in the General seemed to take it to heart, but the General himself displayed no sign of gloom. He took another drink, and then emptied his

pockets of all the bank-bills they contained, and distributed them among his creditors with perfect amiability. There was not enough money to go around, evidently, for he called out in a pleasant voice to his son :

"Come here a minute, Hod. Have you got thirty dollars loose in your pocket? I'm that much short." He pushed about the heap of limp turkeys on the snow under the table with one foot, in amused contemplation, and added: "These skinny wretches have cost us about nine dollars apiece. You might at least have fed 'em a trifle better, Dave."

Horace produced the sum mentioned and handed it over to his father with a somewhat subdued, not to say rueful, air. He did not quite like the way in which the little word "us" had been used.

While the General was light-heartedly engaged in apportioning out his son's money, and settling his bill, a new man came up, and, taking a rifle in his hands, inquired the price of a shot. He was told that it was ten cents, and to this information was added with cold emphasis the remark that before he fooled with the guns he must put down his money.

"Oh, I've got the coin fast enough," said the newcomer, ringing four dimes on the table.

"Wait a moment," said Horace to his father and Reuben, who were about to quit the yard. "Let's watch Ben Lawton shoot. I might as well see the last of my half-dollar. He's had one drink out of it already."

Lawton lifted the gun as if he were accustomed to

firearms, and after he had made sure of his footing on the hard-trodden snow, took a long, careful aim, and fired. It was with evident sorrow that he saw the snow fly a few feet to one side of the turkey. He decided to have only two shots more, and one drink, and the drink first—a drink of such full and notable dimensions that Dave Rantell was half-tempted to intervene between the cup and the lip. The two shots which followed were very good shots indeed—one of them even seemed to have cut some feathers into the air—but they killed no turkey.

Poor Ben looked for a long time after his last bullet, as if in some vague hope that it might have paused on the way, and would resume its fatal course in due season. Then he laid the rifle down with a deep sigh, and walked slowly out, with his hands plunged dejectedly into his trousers pockets, and his shoulders more rounded than ever. The habitual expression of helpless melancholy which his meagre, characterless visage wore was deepened now to despair.

“Well, Ben,” said Horace to him, as he shuffled past them, “you were right. You might just as well have hung around the *dépôt*, and let some one else carry my things. You’ve got no more to show for it now than if you had.”

The young man spoke in the tone of easy, paternal banter which prosperous people find it natural to adopt toward their avowedly weak and foolish brethren, and it did not occur to Lawton to resent it. He stopped, and lifted his head just high enough to

look in a gloomy way at Horace and his companions for a moment; then he dropped it again and turned to resume his course without answering. On second thought he halted, and without again looking up, groaned out:

"There ain't another such a darned worthless fool as I be in the whole darned county. I don't know what I'll say to her. I'm a good mind not to go home at all. Here I was, figurin' on havin' a real Thanksgiving dinner for her, to try and make her feel glad she'd come back amongst us again; and if I'd saved my money and fired all five shots, I'd a got a bird, sure—and that's what makes me so blamed mad. It's always my darned luck!"

While he spoke a boy came up to them, dragging a hand-sled upon which General Boyce's costly collection of poultry was piled. Horace stopped the lad, and took from the top of the heap two of the best of the fowls.

"Here, Ben," he said, "take these home with you. We've got more than we know what to do with. We should only give them away to people who didn't need them."

Lawton had been moved almost to tears by the force of his self-depreciatory emotions. His face brightened now on the instant, as he grasped the legs of the turkeys and felt their weight. He looked satisfiedly down at their ruffling circumference of blue-black feathers, and at their pimply pink heads dragging sidewise on the snow.

"You're a regular brick, Hod," he said, with more

animation than it was his wont to display. "They'll be tickled to death down to the house. I'm obliged to you, and so she'll be—"

He stopped short, weighed the birds again in his hand with a saddened air, and held them out toward Horace. All the joy had gone out of his countenance and tone.

"No ; I'm much obliged to you, Hod, but I can't take 'em," he said, with pathetic reluctance.

"Nonsense !" replied the young man, curtly. "Don't make a fool of yourself twice in the same afternoon. Of course you'll take them. Only go straight home with them, instead of selling them for drinks."

Horace turned upon his heel as he spoke and rejoined his father and Reuben, who had walked on slowly ahead. The General had been telling his companion some funny story, and his eyes were still twinkling with merriment as his son came up, and he repeated to him the gist of his humorous narrative.

Horace did not seem to appreciate the joke, and kept a serious face even at the most comical part of the anecdote. This haunting recurrence of the Lawton business, as he termed it in his thoughts, annoyed him ; and still more was he disturbed and vexed by what he had seen of his father. During his previous visit to Thessaly upon his return from Europe, some months before, the General had been leading a temperate and almost monastic life under the combined restraints of rheumatism and hay-fever, and this present revelation of his tastes and

habits came therefore in the nature of a surprise to Horace. The latter was unable to find any elements of pleasure in this surprise, and scowled at the snow accordingly, instead of joining in his father's laughter. Besides, the story was not altogether of the kind which sits with most dignity on paternal lips.

The General noted his son's solemnity and deferred to it. "I'm glad you gave that poor devil the turkeys," he said. "I suppose they're as poor as they make 'em. Only—what do you think, Tracy; as long as I'd shot all the birds, I might have been consulted, eh, about giving them away?"

The query was put in a jocular enough tone, but it grated upon the young man's mood. "I don't think the turkey business is one that either of us particularly shines in," he replied, with a snap in his tone. "You say that your turkeys cost you nine dollars apiece. Apparently I am by way of paying fifteen dollars each for my two."

"By way of"—that's an English expression, isn't it?" put in Reuben, hastily, to avert the threatened domestic dispute. "I've seen it in novels, but I never heard it used before."

The talk was fortunately turned at this from poultry to philology; and the General, though he took no part in the conversation, evinced no desire to return to the less pleasant subject. Thus the three walked on to the corner where their ways separated. As they stood here for the parting moment, Reuben said in an aside to Horace:

“That was a kindly act of yours—to give Lawton the turkeys. I can’t tell you how much it pleased me. Those little things show the character of a man. If you like to come down to my office Friday, and are still of the same mind about a partnership, we will talk it over.”

CHAPTER VI.

THANKSGIVING AT THE MINSTERS'.

I REMEMBER having years ago been introduced to one of America's richest men, as he sat on the broad veranda of a Saratoga hotel in the full glare of the morning sunlight. It is evident that at such a solemn moment I should have been filled with valuable and impressive reflections; yet, such is the perversity and wrong-headedness of the human mind, I could for the life of me evolve no weightier thought than this: "Here is a man who can dispose of hundreds of millions of dollars by a nod of the head, yet cannot with all this countless wealth command a dye for his whiskers which will not turn violet in the sunshine!"

The sleek and sober-visaged butler who moved noiselessly about the dining-room of the Minster household may have had some such passing vision of the vanity of riches, as he served what was styled a Thanksgiving dinner. Vast as the fortune was, it could not surround that board with grateful or light-hearted people upon even this selected festal day.

The room itself must have dampened any but the most indomitably cheerful spirits. It had a sombre and formal aspect, to which the tall oleanders and

dwarf palms looking through the glass on the conservatory side lent only an added sense of coldness. The furniture was of dark oak and even darker leather; the walls were panelled in two shades of the same serious tint; the massive, carved side-board and the ponderous mantel declined to be lifted out of their severe dignity by such trivial accessories as silver and rare china and vases of flowers. There were pictures in plenty, and costly lace curtains inside the heavy outer hangings at the windows, and pretty examples of embroidery here and there which would have brightened any less resolutely grave environment: in this room they went for nothing, or next to nothing.

Four women sat at this Thanksgiving dinner, and each, being in her own heart conscious of distinct weariness, politely took it for granted that the others were enjoying their meal.

Talk languished, or fitfully flared up around some strictly uninteresting subject with artificial fervor the while the butler was in the room. His presence in the house was in the nature of an experiment, and Mrs. Minster from time to time eyed him in a furtive way, and then swiftly turned her glance aside on the discovery that he was eying her. Probably he was as good as other butlers, she reflected; he was undoubtedly English, and he had come to her well recommended by a friend in New York. But she was unaccustomed to having a man servant in the dining-room, and it jarred upon her to call him by his surname, which was Cozzens, in-

stead of by the more familiar Daniel or Patrick as she did the gardener and the coachman. Before he came—a fortnight or so ago—she had vaguely thought of him as in livery; but the idea of seeing him in anything but what she called a “dress suit,” and he termed “evening clothes,” had been definitely abandoned. What she chiefly wished about him now was that he would not look at her all the time.

Mrs. Minster, being occupied in this way, contributed very little to what conversation there was during the dinner. It was not her wont to talk much at any time. She was perhaps a trifle below the medium height of her sex, full-figured rather than stout, and with a dark, capable, and altogether singular face, in which the most marked features were a proud, thin-lipped mouth, which in repose closed tight and drew downward at the corners; small black eyes, that had an air of seeing very cleverly through things; and a striking arrangement of her prematurely white hair, which was brushed straight from the forehead over a high roll. From a more or less careful inspection of this face, even astute people were in the habit of concluding that Mrs. Minster was a clever and haughty woman. In truth, she was neither. Her reserve was due in part to timidity, in part to lack of interest in the matters which seemed to concern those with whom she was most thrown into contact outside her own house. Her natural disposition had been the reverse of unkindly, but it included an element of suspicion, which the

short and painful career of her son, and the burden of responsibility for a great estate, had tended unduly to develop. She did not like many of the residents of Thessaly, yet it had never occurred to her to live elsewhere. If the idea had dawned in her mind, she would undoubtedly have picked out as an alternative her native village on the Hudson, where her Dutch ancestors had lived from early colonial times. The life of a big city had never become even intelligible to her, much less attractive. She went to the Episcopal church regularly, although she neither professed nor felt any particular devotion to religious ideals or tenets. She gave of her substance generously, though not profusely, to all properly organized and certified charities, but did not look about for, or often recognize when they came in her way, subjects for private benefaction. She applied the bulk of her leisure time to the writing of long and perfectly commonplace letters to female relatives in various sections of the Republic. She was profoundly fond of her daughters, but was rarely impelled to demonstrative proofs of this affection. Very often she grew tired of inaction, mental and physical; but she accepted this without murmuring as a natural and proper result of her condition in life, much as one accepts an uncomfortable sense of repletion after a dinner. When she did not know what else to do, she ordinarily took a nap.

It must have been by the law of opposite attraction that her chosen intimate was Miss Tabitha Wilcox, the spare and angular little lady who sat across

the table from her, the sole guest at the Thanksgiving dinner. The most vigorous imagination could not conceive *her* in the act of dozing for so much as an instant during hours when others kept awake. Vigilant observation and an unwearying interest in affairs were written in every line of her face: you could read them in her bright, sharp eyes; in the alert, almost anxious posture of her figure; in the very conformation of the little rows of iron-gray curls, which mounted like circular steps above each ear. She was a kindly soul, was Miss Tabitha, who could not listen unmoved to any tale of honest suffering, and who gave of her limited income to the poor with more warmth than prudence.

Her position in Thessaly was a unique one. She belonged, undoubtedly, to the first families, for her grandfather, Judge Abijah Wilcox, had been one of the original settlers, in those halcyon years following the close of the Revolution, when the good people of Massachusetts and Connecticut swarmed, uninvited, across the Hudson, and industriously divided up among themselves the territorial patrimony of the slow and lackadaisical Dutchmen. Miss Tabitha still lived in the roomy old house which the judge had built; she sat in one of the most prominent pews in the Episcopal church, and her prescriptive right to be president of the Dorcas Mite Society had not been questioned now these dozen years. Although she was far from being wealthy, her place in the very best and most exclusive society of Thessaly was taken for granted by everybody. But Miss

Tabitha was herself not at all exclusive. She knew most of the people in the village: only the insuperable limitations of time and space prevented her knowing them all. And not even these stern barriers availed to bound her information concerning alike acquaintances and strangers. There were persons who mistook her eager desire to be of service in whatever was going forward for meddlesomeness. Some there were who even resented her activity, and thought of her as a malevolent old gossip. These latter were deeply in the wrong. Miss Tabitha loved everybody, and had never consciously done injury to any living soul. As for gossip, she could no more help talking than the robin up in the elm boughs of a sunny April morning can withhold the song that is in him.

It has been said that the presence of the butler threw a gloom over the dinner-party. It did not silence Miss Tabitha, but at least she felt constrained to discourse upon general and impersonal subjects while he was in hearing. The two daughters of the house, who faced each other at the ends of the table, asked her questions or offered comments at intervals, and once or twice their mother spoke. All ate from the plates that were set before them, in a perfunctory way, without evidence of appreciation. There was some red wine in a decanter on the table—I fancy none of them could have told precisely what it was—and of this Miss Tabitha drank a little, diluted with water. The two girls had allowed the butler to fill their glasses as well, and from time to

time they made motions as of sipping from these, merely to keep their guest in company. Mrs. Minster had no wine-glasses at her plate, and drank ice-water. Every time that any one of the others lifted the wine to her lips, a common thought seemed to flash through the minds around the table—the memory of the son and heir who had died from drink.

When the butler, with an accession of impressiveness in his reserved demeanor, at last handed around plates containing each its thin layer of pale meat, Ethel Minster was moved to put into words what all had been feeling:

“Mamma, this isn’t like Thanksgiving at all!” she said, with the freedom of a favorite child; “it was ever so much nicer to have the turkey on the table where we could all see him, and pick out in our minds what part we would especially like. To have the carving done outside, and only slices of the breast brought in to us—it is as if we were away from home somewhere, in a hotel among strangers.”

Mrs. Minster, by way of answer, looked at the butler, the glance being not so much an inquiry as a reference of the matter to one who was a professor of this particular sort of thing. Her own inclination jumped with that of her daughter, but the possession of a butler entailed certain responsibilities, which must be neither ignored nor evaded. Happily Cozzens’s mind was not wholly inelastic. He uttered no word, but, with a slight obeisance which comprehended mistress and daughter and

guest in careful yet gracious gradations of significance, went out, and presently returned with a huge dish, which he set in front of Mrs. Minster. He brought the carving instruments, and dignifiedly laid them in their place, as a chamberlain might invest a queen with her sceptre. Even when Miss Kate said, "If we need you any more, Cozzens, we will ring," he betrayed neither surprise nor elation, but bowed again gravely, and left the room, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

"I am sure he will turn out a perfect jewel," said Miss Tabitha. "You were very fortunate to get him."

"But there are times," said Kate, "when one likes to take off one's rings, even if the stones are perfection itself."

This guarded reference to the fact that Mrs. Minster had secured an admirable servant who was a nuisance at small feminine dinner-parties sufficed to dismiss the subject. Miss Tabitha assumed on the moment a more confidential manner and tone:

"I wonder if you've heard," she said, "that young Horace Boyce has come back. Why, now I think of it, he must have come up in your train."

"He was in our car," replied Mrs. Minster. "He sat by us, and talked all the way up. I never heard a man's tongue run on so in all my born days."

"He takes that from his grandmother Beekman," explained Miss Tabitha, by way of parenthesis. "She was something dreadful: talking 'thirteen to the dozen' doesn't begin to express it. You don't

remember her. She went down to New York when I was a mere slip of a girl, to have a set of false teeth fitted—they were a novelty in those days—and it was winter time, and she wouldn't listen to the dentist's advice to keep her mouth shut, and she caught cold, and it turned into lockjaw, and that was the last of her. It was just after her daughter Julia had been married to young Sylvanus Boyce. Dear me, how time flies! I can remember her old bombazine gown and her black Spanish mits, and her lace cap on one side of her head, as if it were only yesterday. And here Julia's been dead twenty years and more, and her grown-up son's come home from Europe, and the General—"

The old maid stopped short, because her sentence could not be charitably finished. "How did *you* like Horace?" she asked, to shift the subject, and looking at Kate Minster.

The tall, dark girl with the rich complexion and the beautiful, proud eyes glanced up at her questioner impatiently, as if disposed to resent the inquiry. Then she seemed to reflect that no offence could possibly have been intended, for she answered pleasantly enough :

"He seemed an amiable sort of person; and I should judge he was clever, too. He always was a smart boy—I think that is the phrase. He talked to mamma most of the time."

"How can you say that, Kate? I'm sure it was because you scarcely answered him at all, and read your book—which was not very polite."

"I was afraid to venture upon anything more than monosyllables with him," said Kate, "or I should have been ruder still. I should have had to tell him that I did not like Americans who made the accident of their having been to Europe an excuse for sneering at those who haven't been there, and that would have been highly impolite, wouldn't it?"

"I don't think he sneered," replied Mrs. Minster. "I thought he tried to be as affable and interesting as he knew how. Pray what did he say that was sneering?"

"Oh, dear me, I don't in the least remember what he said. It was his tone, I think, more than any special remark. He had an air of condoling with me because he had seen so many things that I have only read about; and he patronized the car, and the heating-apparatus, and the conductor, and the poor little black porter, and all of us."

"He was a pretty boy. Does he hold his own, now he's grown up?" asked Miss Tabitha. "He used to favor the Boyce side a good deal."

"I should say he favored the Boyce side to the exclusion of everybody else's side," said Kate, with a little smile at her own conceit, "particularly his own individual section of it. He is rather tall, with light hair, light eyes, light mustache, light talk, light everything; and he looks precisely like all the other young men you see in New York nowadays, with their coats buttoned in just such a way, and their gloves of just such a shade, and a scarf of just such a shape with the same kind of pin in it, and

their hats laid sidewise in the rack so that you can observe that they have a London maker's brand inside. There! you have his portrait to a *t*. Do you recognize it?"

"What will poor countrified Thessaly ever do with such a metropolitan model as this?" asked Ethel. "We shall all be afraid to go out in the street, for fear he should discover us to be out of the fashion."

"Oh, he is not going to stay here," said Mrs. Minster. "He told us that he had decided to enter some law firm in New York. It seems a number of very flattering openings have been offered him."

"I happen to know," put in Miss Tabitha, "that he *is* going to stay here. What is more, he has as good as struck up a partnership with Reuben Tracy. I had it this morning from a lady whose brother-in-law is extremely intimate with the General."

"That is very curious," mused Mrs. Minster. "He certainly talked yesterday of settling in New York, and mentioned the offers he had had, and his doubt as to which to accept."

"Are you sure, mamma," commented Kate, "that he wasn't talking merely to hear himself talk?"

"I like the looks of that Reuben Tracy," interposed Ethel. "He always suggests the idea that he is the kind of man you could tie something to, and come back hours afterward and find it all there just as you had left it."

The girl broke into an amused laugh at the appearance of this metaphor, when she had finished it, and

the others joined in her gayety. Under the influence of this much-needed enlivenment, Miss Tabitha took another piece of turkey and drank some of her wine and water. They began talking about Tracy.

"It will be a good thing for Horace Boyce," said Miss Tabitha. "He couldn't have a steadier or better partner for business. They tell me that Tracy handles more work, as it is, than any other two lawyers in town. He's a very good-hearted man too, and charitable, as everybody will admit who knows him. What a pity it is that he doesn't take an interest in church affairs, and rent a pew, and set an example to young men in that way."

"On the contrary, I sometimes think, Tabitha," said Miss Kate, idly crumbling the bread on the cloth before her, "that it is worth while to have an occasional good man or woman altogether outside the Church. They prevent those on the inside from getting too conceited about their own virtues. There would be no living with the parsons and the deacons and the rest if you couldn't say to them now and then: 'See, you haven't a monopoly of goodness. Here are people just as honest and generous and straightforward as you are yourselves, who get along without any altar or ark whatever.'"

Mrs. Minster looked at her daughter with an almost imperceptible lifting of the brows. Her comment had both apology and mild reproof in it:

"To hear Kate talk, one would think she was a

perfect atheist. She is always defending infidels and such people. I am sure I can't imagine where she takes it from."

"Why, mamma!" protested the girl, "who has said anything about infidels? We have no earthly right to brand people with that word, simply because we don't see them going to church as we do. We none of us know this Mr. Tracy to even bow to him—at least I don't—and we know no more about his religious opinions than we do about—what shall I say?—about the man in the moon. But I have heard others speak of him frequently, and always with respect. I wasn't defending him. Why should I? I merely said it was worth while to keep in mind that men could be good without renting a pew in church."

"I don't like to hear you speak against religion, that is all," replied the mother, placidly. "It isn't—ladylike."

"And if you come to inquire," interposed Miss Tabitha, speaking with great gentleness, as of one amiably admonishing impetuous and ill-informed youth, "you will generally find that there is something not quite as it should be about these people who are so sure that they need no help to be good. Only last evening Sarah Cheeseborough told me something about your Mr. Tracy—"

"*My* Mr. Tracy!"

"Well, about *the* Mr. Tracy, then, that she saw with her own eyes. I would scarcely have believed it. It only goes to show what poor worms the best

of us are, if we just rely upon our own strength alone."

"What was it?" asked Mrs. Minster, with a slight show of interest.

Miss Tabitha by way of answer threw a meaning glance at the two girls, and discreetly took a sip of her wine and water.

"Oh, don't mind us, Tabitha!" said Kate. "I am twenty-three, and Ethel is nearly twenty, and we are allowed to sit up at the table quite as if we were grown people."

The sarcasm was framed in pleasantry, and Miss Tabitha took it in smiling good part, with no further pretence of reservation.

"Well, then, you must know that Ben Lawton—he's a shiftless sort of coot who lives out in the hollow, and picks up odd jobs; the sort of people who were brought up on the canal, and eat woodchucks—Ben Lawton has a whole tribe of daughters. Some of them work around among the farmers, and some are in the button factory, and some are at home doing nothing; and the oldest of the lot, she ran away from here five years ago or so, and went to Tecumseh. She was a good-looking girl—she worked one season for my sister near Tyre, and I really liked her looks—but she went altogether to the dogs, and, as I say, quit these parts, everybody supposed for good. But, lo and behold! what must she do but turn up again like a bad penny, after all this time, and, now I think of it, come back on the very train you travelled by, yesterday, too!"

"There is nothing very remarkable about that," commented Kate. "So far as I have seen, one doesn't have to show a certificate of character to buy a railway ticket. The man at the window scowls upon the just and the unjust with impartial incivility."

"Just wait," continued Miss Tabitha, impressively, "wait till you have heard all! This girl—Jess Lawton, they call her—drove home on the express-sleigh with her father right in broad daylight. And who do you think followed up there on foot—in plain sight, too—and went into the house, and stayed there a full half hour? Why, the immaculate Mr. Tracy! Sarah Cheesborough saw him pass the place, and watched him go into their house—you can see across lots from her side windows to where the Lawtons live—and just for curiosity she kept track of the time. The girl hadn't been home an hour before he made his appearance, and Sarah vows she hasn't seen him on that road before in years. *Now* what do you think?"

"I think Sarah Cheesborough might profitably board up her side windows. It would help her to concentrate her mind on her own business," said Kate. Her sister Ethel carried this sentiment farther by adding: "So do I! She is a mean, meddling old cat. I've heard you say so yourself, Tabitha."

The two elder ladies took a different view of the episode, and let it be seen; but Mrs. Minster seized the earliest opportunity of changing the topic of

conversation, and no further mention was made during the afternoon of either Reuben Tracy or the Lawtons.

The subject was, indeed, brought up later on, when the two girls were alone together in the little boudoir connecting their apartments. Pale-faced Ethel sat before the fire, dreamily looking into the coals, while her sister stood behind her, brushing out and braiding for the night the younger maiden's long blonde hair.

"Do you know, Kate," said Ethel, after a long pause, "it hurt me almost as if that Mr. Tracy had been a friend of ours, when Tabitha told about him and—and that woman. It is so hard to have to believe evil of everybody. You would like to think well of some particular person whom you have seen—just as a pleasant fancy of the mind—and straightway they come and tell odious things about him. Didn't it annoy you? And did you believe it?"

Kate drew the ivory brush slowly over the flowing, soft-brown ringlets lying across her hand, again and again, but kept silence until Ethel repeated her latter question. Then she said, evasively:

"When we get to be old maids, we sha'n't spend our time in collecting people's shortcomings, as boys collect postage-stamps, shall we, dear?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER'S WELCOME.

THE President of the United States, that year, had publicly professed himself of the opinion that "the maintenance of pacific relations with all the world, the fruitful increase of the earth, the rewards accruing to honest toil throughout the land, and the nation's happy immunity from pestilence, famine, and disastrous visitations of the elements," deserved exceptional recognition at the hands of the people on the last Thursday in November. The Governor of the State went further, both in rhetorical exuberance and in his conception of benefits received, for he enumerated "the absence of calamitous strife between capital and labor," "the patriotic spirit which had dominated the toilers of the mine, the forge, the factory, and the mill, in their judicious efforts to unite and organize their common interests," and "the wise and public-spirited legislation which in the future, like a mighty bulwark, would protect the great and all-important agricultural community from the debasing competition of unworthy wares"—as among the other things for which everybody should be thankful.

There were many, no doubt, who were conscious of

a kindly glow as they read beneath the formal words designating the holiday, and caught the pleasant and gracious significance of the Thanksgiving itself—strange and perverted survival as it is of a gloomy and unthankful festival. There were others, perhaps, who smiled a little at his Excellency's shrewd effort to placate the rising and hostile workingmen's movement and get credit from the farmers for the recent oleomargarine bill, and for the rest took the day merely as a welcome breathing spell, with an additional drink or two in the forenoon, and a more elaborate dinner than was usual.

In the Lawton household they troubled their heads neither about the text and tricks of the proclamations nor the sweet and humane meaning of the day. There were much more serious matters to think of.

The parable of the Prodigal Son has long been justly regarded as a model of terse and compact narrative; but modern commentators of the analytical sort have a quarrel with the abruptness of its ending. They would have liked to learn what the good stay-at-home son said and did after his father had for a second time explained the situation to him. Did he, at least outwardly, agree that "it was meet that we should make merry and be glad"? And if he consented to go into the house, and even to eat some of the fatted calf, did he do it with a fine, large, hearty pretence of being glad? Did he deceive the returned Prodigal, for example, into believing in the fraternal welcome? Or did he lie in wait, and, when

occasion offered, quietly, and with a polite smile, rub gall and vinegar into the wayfarer's wounds? Alas, this we can only guess.

Poor Ben Lawton had been left in no doubt as to the attitude of his family toward the prodigal daughter. A sharp note of dissent had been raised at the outset, on the receipt of her letter—a note so shrill and strenuous that for the moment it almost scared him into begging her not to come. Then his better nature asserted itself, and he contrived to mollify somewhat the wrath of his wife and daughters by inventing a tortuous system of lies about Jessica's intentions and affairs. He first established the fiction that she meant only to pay them a flying visit. Upon this he built a rambling edifice of falsehood as to her financial prosperity, and her desire to do a good deal toward helping the family. Lastly, as a crowning superstructure of deception, he fabricated a theory that she was to bring with her a lot of trunks filled with costly and beautiful dresses, with citified bonnets and parasols and high-heeled shoes, beyond belief—all to be distributed among her sisters. Once well started, he lied so luxuriantly and with such a flowing fancy about these things, that his daughters came to partially believe him—him whom they had not believed before since they could remember—and prepared themselves to be civil to their half-sister.

There were five of these girls—the offspring of a second marriage Lawton contracted a year or so after the death of baby Jessica's mother. The eldest,

Melissa, was now about twenty, and worked out at the Fairchild farm-house some four miles from Thessaly—a dull, discontented young woman, with a heavy yet furtive face and a latent snarl in her voice. Lucinda was two years younger, and toiled in the Scotch-cap factory in the village. She also was a commonplace girl, less obviously bad-tempered than Melissa, but scarcely more engaging in manner. Next in point of age was Samantha, who deserves some notice by herself, and after her came the twins, Georgiana and Arabella, two overgrown, coarse, giggling hoydens of fifteen, who obtained intermittent employment in the button factory.

Miss Samantha, although but seventeen, had for some time been tacitly recognized as the natural leader of the family. She did no work either in factory or on farm, and the local imagination did not easily conceive a condition of things in which she could find herself reduced to the strait of manual labor. Her method, baldly stated, was to levy more or less reluctant contributions upon whatever the rest of the family brought in. There was a fiction abroad that Samantha stayed at home to help her mother. The facts were that she was only visible at the Lawton domicile at meal-times and during inclement weather, and that her mother was rather pleased than otherwise at this being the case.

Samantha was of small and slight figure, with a shrewd, prematurely-sapient face that was interesting rather than pretty, and with an eye which, when it was not all demure innocence, twinkled coldly

like that of a rodent of prey. She had several qualities of mind and deportment which marked her as distinct from the mass of village girls; that which was most noticeable, perhaps, was her ability to invent and say sharp, comical, and cuttingly sarcastic things without herself laughing at them. This was felt to be a rare attainment indeed in Thessaly, and its possession gave her much prestige among the young people of both sexes, who were conscious of an insufficient command alike over their tongues and their boisterous tendencies. Samantha could have counted her friends, in the true, human sense of the word, upon her thumbs; but of admirers and toadies she swayed a regiment. Her own elder sisters, Melissa and Lucinda, alternated between sulky fear of her and clumsy efforts at propitiation; the junior twins had never as yet emerged from a plastic state of subordination akin to reverence. Samantha's attitude toward them all was one of lofty yet observant criticism, relieved by lapses into half-satirical, half-jocose amiability as their pay-days approached. On infrequent occasions she developed a certain softness of demeanor toward her father, but to her mother she had been uniformly and contemptuously uncivil for years.

Of this mother, the second Mrs. Lawton, there is little enough to say. She was a pallid, ignorant, helpless slattern, gaunt of frame, narrow of forehead, and bowed and wrinkled before her time. Like her husband, she came of an ancestry of lake and canal boatmen; and though twenty odd years had passed

since increasing railroad competition forced her parents to abandon their over-mortgaged scow and seek a living in the farm country, and she married the young widower Ben Lawton in preference to following them, her notions of housekeeping and of existence generally had never expanded beyond the limits of a canal-boat cabin. She rose at a certain hour, maundered along wearily through such tasks of the day as forced themselves upon her, and got to bed again as early as might be, inertly thankful that the day was done. She rarely went out upon the street, and still more rarely had any clothes fit to go out in. She had a vague pride in her daughter Samantha, who seemed to her to resemble the heroines of the continued stories which she assiduously followed in the *Fireside Weekly*, and sometimes she harbored a formless kind of theory that if her baby boy Alonzo had lived, things would have been different; but her interest in the rest of the family was of the dimmest and most spasmodic sort. In England she would have taken to drink, and been beaten for it, and thus at least extracted from life's pilgrimage some definite sensations. As it was, she lazily contributed vile cooking, a foully-kept house, and a grotesque waste of the pittance which came into her hands, to the general squalor which hung like an atmosphere over the Lawtons.

The house to which Jessica had come with her father the previous afternoon was to her a strange abode. At the time of her flight, five years before, the family had lived on a cross-road some miles

away ; at present they were encamped, so to speak, in an old and battered structure which had been a country house in its time, but was now in the centre of a new part of Thessaly built up since war. The building, with its dingy appearance and poverty-stricken character, was an eyesore to the neighborhood, and everybody looked hopefully forward to the day when the hollow in which it stood should be filled up, and the house and its inhabitants cleared away out of sight.

Jessica upon her arrival had been greeted with constrained coolness by her stepmother, who did not even offer to kiss her, but shook hands limply instead, and had been ushered up to her room by her father. It was a low and sprawling chamber, with three sides plastered, and the fourth presenting a time-worn surface of naked lathing. In it were a bed, an old chest of drawers, a wooden chair, and a square piece of rag carpet just large enough to emphasize the bareness of the surrounding floor. This was the company bedroom ; and after Ben had brought up all her belongings and set them at the foot of the bed, and tiptoed his way down-stairs again, Jessica threw herself into the chair in the centre of its cold desolation, and wept vehemently.

There came after a time, while she still sat sobbing in solitude, a soft rap at her door. When it was repeated, a moment later, she hastily attempted to dry her eyes, and answered, "Come in." Then the door opened, and the figure of Samantha appeared. She was smartly dressed, and she had a half-smile

on her face. She advanced readily toward the chair.

"Don't you know me?" she said, as Jessica rose and looked at her doubtfully in the fading light. "I'm Samantha. Of course, I've grown a good deal; but Lord! I'd have known you anywhere. I'm glad to see you."

Her tone betrayed no extravagance of heated enthusiasm, but still it *was* a welcome in its way; and as the two girls kissed each other, Jessica choked down the last of her sobs, and was even able to smile a little.

"Yes, I think I should have known you," she replied. "Oh, now I look at you, of course I should. Yes, you've grown into a fine girl. I've thought of you very, very often."

"I'll bet not half as often as I've thought of you," Samantha made answer, cheerfully. "You've been living in a big city, where there's plenty to take up your time; but it gets all-fired slow down here sometimes, and then there's nothing to do but to envy them that's been able to get out."

Samantha had been moving the small pieces of luggage at the foot of the bed with her feet as she spoke. With her eyes still on them she asked, in a casual way:

"Father gone for the rest of your things? It's like him to make two jobs of it."

"This is all I have brought; there is nothing more," said Jessica.

"*What!*"

Samantha was eying her sister with open-mouthed incredulity. She stammered forth, after a prolonged pause of mental confusion :

"You mean to say you ain't brought any swell dresses, or fancy bonnets, or silk wrappers, or seal-skins, or—or anything? Why, dad swore you was bringing whole loads of that sort of truck with you!" She added, as if in angry quest for consolation: "Well, there's one comfort, he always *was* a liar!"

"I'm sorry if you're disappointed," said Jessica, stiffly; "but this is all I've brought, and I can't help it."

"But you must have had no end of swell things," retorted the younger girl. "It stands to reason you must. I know that much. And what have you done with 'em?" She broke out in loud satire: "Oh, yes! A precious lot you thought about me and the rest of us! I daresay it kept you awake nights, thinking about us so much!"

Jessica gazed in painful astonishment at this stripling girl, who had regarded her melancholy home-coming merely in the light of a chance to enjoy some cast-off finery. All the answers that came into her head were too bitter and disagreeable. She did not trust herself to reply, but, still wearing her hat and jacket, walked to the window and looked out down the snowy road. The impulse was strong within her to leave the house on the instant.

Samantha had gone away, slamming the door

viciously behind her, and Jessica stood for a long time at the window, her mind revolving in irregular and violent sequence a score of conflicting plans and passionate notions. There were moments in this gloomy struggle of thought when she was tempted to throw everything to the winds—her loyalty to pure-souled Annie Fairchild, her own pledges to herself, her hopes and resolves for the future, everything—and not try any more. And when she had put these evil promptings behind her, that which remained was only less sinister.

As she stood thus, frowning down through the unwashed panes at the white, cheerless prospect, and tearing her heart in the tumultuous revery of revolt, the form of a man advancing up the road came suddenly under her view. He stopped when he was in front of the Lawton house, and looked inquiringly about him. The glance which he directed upwards fell full upon her at the window. The recognition was mutual, and he turned abruptly from the road and came toward the house. Jessica hurriedly took off her hat and cloak. Reuben Tracy had come to see her!

It was her stepmother who climbed the stairs to notify her, looking more lank and slatternly than ever, holding the bedroom door wide open, and saying sourly: "There's a man down-stairs to see you already," as if the visit were an offence, and Jessica could not pretend to be surprised. "Yes, I saw him," she answered, and hurried past Mrs. Lawton, and down to the gaunt, dingy front room, with its

bare walls, scant furniture, and stoveless discomfort, which not even Samantha dared call a parlor.

She could remember afterward that Reuben stood waiting for her with his hat in his left hand, and that he had taken the glove from his right to shake hands with her; and this she recalled more distinctly than anything else. He had greeted her with grave kindness, had mentioned receiving notice from the Fairchilds of her coming, and had said that of course whatever he could do to help her he desired to do. Then there had been a pause, during which she vaguely wavered between a wish that he had not come, and a wild, childish longing to hide her flushed face against his overcoat, and weep out her misery. What she did do was to point to a chair, and say, "Won't you take a seat?"

"It is very kind of you to come," she went on, "but—" She broke off suddenly and looked away from him, and through the window at the snow-banks outside. "How early the winter has closed in," she added, with nervous inconsequence.

Reuben did not even glance out at the snow. "I'm bound to say that it isn't very clear to me what use I can be to you," he said. "Of course, I'm all in the dark as to what you intend to do. Mr. Fairchild did not mention that you had any definite plans."

"I had thought some of starting a milliner's shop, of course very small, by myself. You know I have been working in one for some months at Tecumseh, ever since Mrs. Fairchild—ever since she—"

The girl did not finish the sentence, for Reuben nodded gravely, as if he understood, and that seemed to be all that was needed.

"That might do," he said, after a moment's thought, and speaking even more deliberately than usual. "I suppose I ought to tell you this doesn't seem to me a specially wise thing, your coming back here. Don't misunderstand me; I wouldn't say anything to discourage you, for the world. And since you *have* come, it wasn't of much use, perhaps, to say that. Still, I wanted to be frank with you, and I don't understand why you did come. It doesn't appear that the Fairchilds thought it was wise, either."

"*She* did," answered Jessica, quickly, "because she understood what I meant—what I had in mind to do when I got here. But I'm sure he laughed at it when she explained it to him; she didn't say so, but I know he did. He is a man, and men don't understand."

Reuben smiled a little, but still compassionately. "Then perhaps I would better give it up in advance, without having it explained at all," he said.

"No; when I saw your name on the sign, down on Main Street, this afternoon, I knew that you would see what I meant. I felt sure you would: you are different from the others. You were kind to me when I was a girl, when nobody else was. You know the miserable childhood I had, and how everybody was against me—all but you."

Jessica had begun calmly enough, but she finished

with something very like a sob, and, rising abruptly, went to the window.

Reuben sat still, thinking over his reply. The suggestion that he differed from the general run of men was not precisely new to his mind, but it had never been put to him in this form before, and he was at a loss to see its exact bearings. Perhaps, too, men are more nearly alike in the presence of a tearful young woman than under most other conditions. At all events, it took him a long time to resolve his answer—until, in fact, the silence had grown awkward.

"I'm glad you have a pleasant recollection of me," he said at last. "I remember you very well, and I was very sorry when you left the school." He had touched the painful subject rather bluntly, but she did not turn or stir from her post near the window, and he forced himself forward. "I was truly much grieved when I heard of it, and I wished that I could have talked with you, or could have known the circumstances in time, or—that is to say—that I could have helped you. Nothing in all my teacher experience pained me more. I—"

"Don't let us talk of it," she broke in. Then she turned and came close beside him, and lifted her hand as if to place it on his shoulder by a frank gesture of friendship. The hand paused in mid-air, and then sank to her side. "I know you were always as good as good could be. You don't need to tell me that."

"And I wasn't telling you that, I hope," he re-

joined, speaking more freely now. "But you have never answered my question. What is it that Seth Fairchild failed to understand, yet which you are sure I will comprehend? Perhaps it is a part of your estimate of me that I should see without being told; but I don't."

"My reason for coming back? I hardly know how to explain it to you."

Reuben made no comment upon this, and after a moment she went on:

"It sounds unlikely and self-conceited, but for months back I have been full of the idea. It was her talk that gave me the notion. I want to be a friend to other girls placed as I was when I went to your school, with miserable homes and miserable company, and hating the whole thing as I hated it, and aching to get away from it, no matter how; and I want to try and keep them from the pitch-hole I fell into. That's what I want—only I can't explain it to you as I could to *her*; and you think it's silly, don't you? And I—begin to think—so—myself."

Reuben had risen now and stood beside her, and put his hand lightly on her shoulder as she finished with this doleful confession. He spoke with grave softness:

"No, not silly: it seems to me a very notable kind of wisdom. I had been thinking only of you, and that you could live more comfortably and happily elsewhere. But it seems that you were thinking of matters much greater than your own. And that surprises me, and pleases me, and makes me ashamed

of my own view. Think you silly? My dear child, I think you are superb. Only"—he spoke more slowly, and in a less confident tone—"unfortunately, though it is wisdom to do the right thing, it doesn't always follow that it is easy, or successful for that matter. You will need to be very strong, in order to stand up straight under the big task you have undertaken—very strong and resolute indeed."

The touch of his hand upon her shoulder had been more to Jessica than his words, the line of which, in truth, she had not clearly followed. And when he ended with his exhortation to robust bravery, she was conscious of feeling weaker than for months before. The woman's nature that was in her softened under the gentle pressure of that strong hand, and all the nameless feminine yearnings for wardenship and shelter from life's battle took voice and pleaded in her heart. Ah, yes! he spoke of her being strong, and the very sound of his voice unnerved her. She could not think; there was no answer to be made to his words, for she had scarcely heard them. No reply of any kind would come to her lips. In place of a mind, she seemed to have only a single sense—vast, overpowering, glorious—and that was of his hand upon her shoulder. And enwrapped, swallowed up in this sense, she stood silent.

Then lo! the hand was gone, and with a start her wits came back. The lawyer was buttoning his overcoat, and saying that he must be going.

She shook hands with him mechanically, in confused apprehension lest she should think of nothing

more to say to him before he departed. She followed him to the hall, and opened the front door for him. On the threshold the words she wanted came to her.

"I will try to be strong," she said, "and I thank you a thousand times for coming."

"Now, you will let me help you; you will come to me freely, won't you?" Reuben said as he lifted his hat.

"Good-by," answered Jessica, slowly, as she closed the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

THANKSGIVING AT THE LAWTONS'.

THE church-bells rang out next morning through a crisp and frosty air. A dazzling glare of reflected sunshine lay on the dry snow, but it gave no suggestion of warmth. The people who passed on their way to Thanksgiving services walked hurriedly, and looked as if their minds were concentrated on the hope that the sexton had lighted the fire in the church furnace the previous day. The milkman who stopped his sleigh just beyond the house of the Lawtons had to beat off a great rim of chalk-white ice with the dipper before he could open his can.

The younger members of the Lawton family were not dependent upon external evidences, however, for their knowledge that it was bitterly cold. It was nearly noon when they began to gather in the kitchen, and cluster about the decrepit old cooking-stove where burned the only fire in the house. A shivering and unkempt group they made, in the bright daylight, holding their red hands over the cracked stove-lids, and snarling sulkily at the weather and one another when they spoke at all.

Jessica had slept badly, and, rising early and dressing in self-defence against the cold, had found her

father in the act of lighting the kitchen fire. An original impulse prompted her to kiss him when she bade him good-morning; and Ben, rising awkwardly from where he had been kneeling in front of the grate, looked both surprised and shamefacedly gratified. It seemed ages since one of his daughters had kissed him before.

‘It’s a regular stinger of a morning, ain’t it?’ he said, blowing his fingers. “The boards in the sidewalk jest riz up and went off under my feet like pistols last night, when I was coming home.” He added with an accent of uneasiness: “Suppose you didn’t hear me come in?”

He seemed pleased when she shook her head, and his face visibly lightened. He winked at her mysteriously, and going over to a recess in the wall, back of the woodbox, dragged out a lank and dishevelled turkey of a dingy gray color, not at all resembling the fowls that had been presented to him the previous day.

“Trouble with me was,” he said, reflectively, “I shot four turkeys. If I hadn’t been a bang-up shot, and had only killed one, why, I’d been all right. But no, I couldn’t help hitting ’em, and so I got four. Of course, I hadn’t any use for so many: so I got to raffling ’em off, and that’s where my darned luck come in.” He held the bird up, and turned it slowly around, regarding it with an amused chuckle. “You know this cuss ain’t one of them I shot, at all. You see, I got to raffling, and one time I stood to win nine turkeys and a lamp and a jag of firewood. But

then the thing kind o' turned, and went agin me, and darn me if I didn't come out of the little end of the horn, with nothing but this here. Sh-h!—M'rye's coming. Don't say nothing to her. I told her I earnt it carrying in some coal."

Mrs. Lawton entered the room as her husband was putting back the turkey. She offered no remarks beyond a scant "mornin'!" to Jessica, and directed a scowl toward Lawton, before which he promptly disappeared. She replied curtly in the negative when Jessica asked if there was anything she could do; but the novelty of the offer seemed to slowly impress her mind, for after a time she began to talk of her own accord. Ben had come home drunk the night before, she said; there wasn't anything new in that, but it was decidedly new for him to bring something to eat with him. He said he'd been carrying in coal, which was her reason for believing he had been really shaving shingles or breaking up old barrels. He couldn't tell the truth if he tried—it wasn't in him not to lie. The worst of his getting drunk was he was so pesky good-natured the next day. Her father used always to have a headache under similar conditions, and make things peculiarly interesting for everybody round about, from her mother at the helm of the boat to the nigger-boy and the mule on the tow-path ahead. That was the way all other men behaved, too: that is, all who were good for anything. But Ben, he just grinned and did more chores than usual, and hung around generally, as if everybody was bound

to like him because he had made a fool of himself.

This monologue of information and philosophy was not delivered consecutively, but came in disjointed and irrelevant instalments, spread over a considerable space of time. There was nothing in it all which suggested a reply, and Jessica did not even take the trouble to listen very attentively. Her own thoughts were a more than sufficient occupation.

The failure of the experiment upon which she had ventured was looming in unpleasant bulk before her. Every glance about her, every word which fell upon her ears, furnished an added reason why she was not going to be able to live on the lines she had laid out. Viewed even as a visit, the experience was hateful. Contemplated as a career, it was simply impossible. Rather than bear it, she would go back to Tecumseh or New York; and rather than do this, she would kill herself.

Too depressed to control her thoughts, much less to bend them definitely upon consideration of some possible middle course between suicide and existence in this house, Jessica sat silent at the back of the stove, and suffered. Her evening here with her sisters seemed to blend in retrospect with the sleepless night into one long, confused, intolerable nightmare. They had scarcely spoken to her, and she had not known what to say to them. For some reason they had chosen to stay indoors after supper—although this was plainly not their habit—and

under Samantha's lead had entered into a clumsy conspiracy to make her unhappy by meaning looks, and causeless giggles, and more or less ingenious remarks directed at her, but to one another. Lucinda had indeed seemed to shrink from full communion with this cabal, but she had shown no overt act of friendship, and the three younger girls had been openly hostile. Even after she had taken refuge in her cold room, at an abnormally early hour, her sense of their enmity and her isolation had been kept painfully acute by their loud talk in the hall, and in the chamber adjoining hers. Oh, no!—she was not even going to try to live with them, she said resolutely and with set teeth to herself.

They straggled into the kitchen now, and Lucinda was the only one of them who said "good-morning" to her. Jessica answered her greeting almost with effusion, but she would have had her tongue torn out rather than allow it to utter a solitary first word to the others. They stood about the stove for a time, and then sat down to the bare kitchen table upon which the maternal slattern had spread a kind of breakfast. Jessica took her place silently, and managed to eat a little of the bread, dipped in pork fat. The coffee, a strange, greasy, light-brown fluid without milk, she could not bring herself to touch. There was no butter.

After this odious meal was over Samantha brought down a cheap novel, and ensconced herself at the side of the stove, with her feet on a stick of wood in the oven. The twins, after some protest, entered lazily

upon the task of plucking the turkey. Lucinda drew a chair to the window, and began some repairs on her bonnet. For sheer want of other employment, Jessica stood by the window for a time, looking down upon this crude millinery. Then she diffidently asked to be allowed to suggest some changes, and Lucinda yielded the chair to her; and her deft fingers speedily wrought such a transformation in the work that the owner made an exclamation of delight. At this the twins left their turkey to come over and look, and even Samantha at last quitted the stove and sauntered to the window with an exaggerated show of indifference. She looked on for a moment, and then returned with a supercilious sniff, which scared the twins also away. When the hat was finished, and Lucinda had tried it on with obvious satisfaction, Jessica asked her to go for a little walk, and the two went out together.

There was a certain physical relief in escaping from the close and evil-smelling kitchen into the keen, clear cold, but of mental comfort there was little. The sister had nothing beyond a few commonplaces to offer in the way of conversation, and Jessica was in no mood to create small-talk. She walked vigorously forward as far as the sidewalks were shovelled, indifferent to direction and to surroundings, and intent only upon the angry and distracting thoughts which tore one another in her mind. It was not until the drifts forced them to turn that she spoke.

"I always dread to get downright mad: it makes

me sick," she exclaimed, in defiant explanation to the dull Lucinda, who did not seem to have enjoyed her walk.

"If I was you, I wouldn't mind 'em," said the sister. "You just keep a stiff upper lip and tend to your own knitting, and they'll be coming around in no time to get you to fix their bonnets for 'em. I bet you Samantha'll have her brown plush hat to pieces, and be bringing it to you before Sunday."

"She'll have to bring it to me somewhere else, then. To-day's my last day in *that* house, and don't you forget it!"

Jessica spoke with such vehemence that Lucinda could only stare at her in surprise, and the town girl went excitedly on: "When I saw father yesterday, I was almost glad I'd come back; and you—well, you've been decent to me, too. But the rest—ah-h! —I've been swearing in my mind every second since they came into the kitchen this morning. I was all for tears yesterday. I started out crying at the dépôt, and I cried the best part of last night; but I've got all through. Do you mind? I'm through! If there's got to be any more weeping, they're the ones that'll do it!"

She ground her teeth together as she spoke, as if to prevent a further outpouring of angry words. All at once she stopped, on some sudden impulse, and looked her half-sister in the face. It was a long, intent scrutiny, under which Lucinda flushed and fidgeted, but its result was to soften Jessica's mood. She resumed the walk again, but with a less ener-

getic step, and the hard, wrathful lines in her face had begun to melt.

"Probably there will be no need for any one else to weep," she said, ashamed of her recent outburst. "God knows, *I* oughtn't to want to make anybody unhappy!" Then after a moment's silence she asked: "Do you work anywhere?"

"I've got a job at the Scotch-cap factory as long as it's running."

"How much can you earn there?"

"Three dollars a week is what I'm getting, but they're liable to shut down any time now."

Jessica pondered upon this information for a little. Then she put another question, with increased interest. "And do you like it at home, with the rest of them, there?"

"Like it? Yes, about as much as a cat likes hot soap. It's worse now a hundred times than it was when you lit out. If there was any place to go to, I'd be off like a shot."

"Well, then, here's what I wanted to ask you. When I leave it, what's the matter with your coming with me? I mean it. And I'll look after you."

The girl's revolt against her new and odious environment had insensibly carried her back into the free phraseology of her former life. As this was equally familiar to Lucinda's factory-attuned ear, it could not have been the slang expression at which she halted. But she did stop, and in turn looked sharply into Jessica's face. Her own cheeks, red with exposure to the biting air, flushed to a deeper tint.

"You better ask Samantha, if that's your game," she said. "She's more in your line. I ain't on that lay myself."

Before Jessica had fairly comprehended the purport of this remark, her sister had started briskly off by herself. The town girl stood bewildered for a moment, with a little inarticulate moan of pained astonishment trembling on her lips. Then she turned and ran after Lucinda.

"Wait a minute!" she panted out as she overtook her. "You didn't understand me. I wouldn't for a million dollars have you think *that* of me. Please wait, and let me tell you what I really meant. You'll break my heart if you don't!"

Thus adjured, Lucinda stopped, and consented to fall in with the other's slower step. She let it be seen plainly enough that she was a hostile auditor, but still she listened. As Jessica, with a readier tongue than she had found in Reuben Tracy's presence the day before, outlined her plan, the factory-girl heard her, first with incredulity, then with interest, and soon with enthusiasm.

"Go with you? You just bet I will!" was the form of her adhesion to the plan, when it had been presented to her.

The two young women extended their walk by tacit consent far beyond the original intention, and it was past the hour set for the dinner when they at last reluctantly entered the inhospitable-looking domicile. Its shabby aspect and the meanness of its poverty-stricken belongings had never seemed so

apparent before to either of them, as they drew near to it, but it was even less inviting within.

They were warned that it would be so by their father, whom they encountered just outside the kitchen door, chopping up an old plank for firewood. Ben had put on a glaringly white paper collar, to mark his sense of the importance of the festival, and the effect seemed to heighten the gloom on his countenance.

"There's the old Harry to pay in there," he said, nodding his head toward the door. "Melissa's come in from the farm to spend the day, because she heard you was here, Jess, and somehow she got the idee you'd bring a lot of dresses and fixings, and she wanted her share, and got mad because there wasn't any; and Samantha she pitched into her about coming to eat up our dinner, and M'rye she took Melissa's part, and so I kind o' sashayed out. They don't need this wood any more'n a frog needs a tail, but I'm going to whack 'er all up."

The Thanksgiving dinner which shortly ensued had a solitary merit: it did not last very long. But hurried as it was, Jessica did not sit it out. The three sisters with whom she was not friendly had been quarrelling, it seemed, with Melissa, the heavy-browed and surly girl who worked out at the Fairchild farm, but all four combined in an instant against the new-comers. Lucinda had never shone in repartee, and, though she did not shrink from bearing a part in the conflict to which she suddenly

found herself a party, what she was able to say only made matters worse. As for Jessica, she bit her lips in fierce restraint, and for a long time said nothing at all. Melissa had formally shaken hands with her, and had not spoken a word.

When the thin turkey was put upon the table, and Mrs. Lawton had with some difficulty mangled it into eight approximately equal portions, a period of silence fell on the party—silence broken only by sounds of the carnivora which are not expected at the banquets of the polite. Even this measly fowl, badly cooked and defiled by worse than tasteless dressing though it was, represented a treat in the Lawton household, and the resident members fell upon it with eager teeth. Melissa sniffed a trifle at her portion, to let it be seen that they were better fed out on the farm, but she ate vigorously none the less. It was only Jessica who could summon no appetite, and who sat silent and sick at heart, wearily striving at the pretence of eating in order not to attract attention. She was conscious of hostile glances being cast upon her from either side, but she kept her eyes as steadily as she could upon her plate or on her father, who sat opposite and who smiled at her encouragingly from time to time.

It was one of the ungracious twins who first attained the leisure in which to note Jessica's failure to eat, and commented audibly upon the difficulty of catering to the palates of "fine ladies." The phrase was instantly repeated with a sneering emphasis by Samantha, which was the signal for a

burst of giggling, in which Melissa joined. Then Samantha, speaking very distinctly and with an ostentatious parade of significance, informed Melissa that young Horace Boyce had returned to Thesaly only the previous day, "on the very train which father went down to meet." This treatment of Melissa as a vehicle for the introduction of disagreeable topics impressed the twins as a shrewd invention, and one of them promptly added :

"Yes, M'liss', and who do you think called here yesterday? Reuben Tracy the lawyer. He was there in the parlor for half an hour—pretty cold he must have found it—but he wasn't alone."

"Oh, yes, we're getting quite fashionable," put in Samantha. "Father ought to set out a hitching-post and a carriage-block, so that we can receive our callers in style. I hope it will be a stone one, dad."

"And so do I," broke in Lucinda, angrily, "and then I'd like to see your head pounded on it, for all it was worth."

"Well, if it was," retorted Samantha, "it would make a noise. And that's more than yours would."

"You shut up!" shouted Ben Lawton, with the over-vehemence of a weak nature in excitement. "Hain't you got no decency nor compassion in ye? Has she done any harm to you? Can't you give her a chance—to—to live it down?"

While the echoes of this loud, indignant voice were still on the air, Jessica had pushed her chair back, risen, and walked straight to the door leading up-stairs. She looked at nobody as she passed, but

held her pale face proudly erect, though her lips were quivering.

After she had opened the door, some words seemed to come to her, and she turned.

"Live it down!" she said, speaking more loudly than was her wont, to keep her faltering voice from breaking. "Live it down! Why, father, these people don't want me to live at all!"

Then she closed the door, and was seen no more that day.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PARTNERSHIP.

EITHER through the softening influence of the Thanksgiving festival upon litigious natures, or by reason of the relaxing reaction from over-feasting, it happened that no clients of any kind visited Reuben Tracy's law office next day. He came down early enough to light his own fires in both the inner and outer rooms—an experience for which he had been prepared by long observation of the effect produced by holidays upon his clerk—and he sat for a couple of hours by the stove, with his feet on the table and a book in his lap, waiting for Horace Boyce to keep the appointment. The book was an old collection of Carlyle's earlier essays, and Reuben liked it better, perhaps, than any other member of his library family. He had not read it through, and there was a good deal in it which he seemed likely never to read. But there were other portions, long since very familiar to his mind and eye, which it was his habit to go over again whenever he had nothing else to do. The rough, thought-compelling diction rested his brain, by some curious rule of paradox. In the front of the volume he had written, "Not new books, but good books," an apothegm adapted from a pref-

ace of an old English play which had pleased him.

He was indolently ruminating on the wealth of epithet with which the portrait of Cagliostro is painted, when his expected visitor arrived. He laughed aloud at some whimsical conceit that this association of people suggested, and tossed the book aside as he rose.

"I've been killing time," he said, still smiling, "by reading about the prize impostor of the eighteenth century. You know it? — *The Diamond Necklace*. I like to read it. For good, downright swindling and effrontery there's nothing anywhere like that fellow."

Horace glanced at the book as he shook hands and took off his overcoat. He said nothing, but made a mental note that Reuben had come to know about Carlyle after everybody else had ceased reading him.

The two young men sat down together, and their talk for the first hour or so was of business matters. Reuben made clear what his practice was like, its dimensions, its profits, and its claims upon his time. The railroad business had come to him through the influence of his old friend Congressman Ansdell, of Tecumseh, and was very important. The farmers in the vicinity, too, had brought him the bulk of their patronage in the matter of drawing deeds and mortgages—most frequently the latter, he was sorry to say—because he was a farmer's son. This conveyancing work had grown to such proportions, and

entailed such an amount of consultation, that he had been more and more crowded out from active court practice, which he was reluctant to abandon. This was his reason for thinking of a partner. Then the conversation drifted into discussion of Horace's fitness for the place, and his proper share in the earnings of the firm. They went over for dinner to the Dearborn House, where Reuben lived, before this branch of the talk was concluded. Upon their return, over some cigars which Horace thought very bad, they made more headway, and arrived at an understanding satisfactory to both. Reuben printed the firm name of "Tracy & Boyce" on a blotter, to see how it would look, and Horace talked confidently of the new business which the long connection of his family with Thessaly would bring to them.

"You know, they've been here from the very beginning. My great-grandfather was county judge here as far back as 1796, almost the first one after the county was created. And his son, my great-uncle, was congressman one term, and assemblyman for years; and another brother was the president of the bank; and my grandfather was the rector of St. Matthew's; and then my father being the best-known soldier Dearborn sent out during the war—what I mean is, all this ought to help a good deal. It's something to have a name that is as much a part of the place as Thessaly itself. You see what I mean?"

Horace finished with an almost nervous query, for it had dawned upon him that his companion

might not share this high opinion of the value of an old name and pedigree. Come to think of it, the Tracys were nobody in particular, and he glanced apprehensively at Reuben's large, placid face for signs of pique. But there was none visible to the naked eye, and Horace lighted a fresh cigar, and put his feet up on the table beside those of his new partner.

"I daresay there's something in that," Reuben remarked after a time. "Of course there must be, and for that matter I guess a name goes for more in our profession than it does anywhere else. I suppose it's natural for people to assume that jurisprudence runs in families, like snub-noses and drink." As soon as he had uttered this last word, it occurred to him that possibly Horace might construe it with reference to his father, and he made haste to add:

"I never told you, I think, about my own career. I don't talk about it often, for it makes a fellow sound like Mr. Bounderby in *Hard Times*—the chap who was always bragging about being a self-made man."

"No; I'd like to hear about it," said Horace. "The first I remember of you was at the seminary here."

"Well, I was only fifteen years old then, and all the story I've got dates before that. I can just remember when we moved into this part of the world—coming from Orange County. My father had bought a small farm some fifteen miles from here, over near Tyre, and we moved onto it in the spring. I was about five. I had an older brother, Ezra, and

two younger ones. There was a good deal of hard work to do, and father tried to do it all himself, and so by harvest time he was laid up; and the men who came and got in the crops on shares robbed us down to the ground. When winter came, father had to get up, whether he was well enough or not, and chop wood for the market, to make up for the loss on harvesting. One evening he didn't come home, and the team was away all night, too, with mother never going to bed at all, and then before daybreak taking Ezra to carry a lantern, and starting through the drifts for our patch of woods. They found my father dead in the forest, crushed under a falling tree.

"I suppose it was a terrible winter. I only dimly remember it, or the summer that followed. When another winter was coming on, my mother grew frightened. Try the best she knew how, she was worse off every month than she had been the month before. To pay interest on the mortgage, she had to sell what produce we had managed to get in, keeping only a bare moiety for ourselves, and to give up the woodland altogether. Soon the roads would be blocked; there was not enough fodder for what stock we had, nor even food enough for us. We had no store of fuel, and no means of staving off starvation. Under stern compulsion, solely to secure a home for her boys, my mother married a well-to-do farmer in the neighborhood—a man much older than herself, and the owner of a hundred-acre farm and of the mortgages on our own little thirty acres.

"I suppose he meant to be a just man, but he was

as hard as a steel bloom. He was a prodigious worker, and he made us all work, without rest or reward. When I was nine years old, narrow-chested and physically delicate, I had to get up before sunrise for the milking, and then work all day in the hay-field, making and cocking, and obliged to keep ahead of the wagon under pain of a flogging. Three years of this I had, and I recall them as you might a frightful nightmare. I had some stray schooling—my mother insisted upon that—but it wasn't much; and I remember that the weekly paper was stopped after that because Ezra and I wasted too much time in reading it.

“Finally my health gave out. My mother feared that I would die, and at last gained the point of my being allowed to go to Tyre to school, if I could earn my board and clothes there. I went through the long village street there, stopping at every house to ask if they wanted a little boy to do chores for his board and go to school. I said nothing about clothes after the first few inquiries. It took me almost all day to find a place. It was nearly the last house in the village. The people happened to want a boy, and agreed to take me. I had only to take care of two horses, milk four cows, saw wood for three stoves, and run errands. When I lay awake in my new bed that night, it was with joy that I had found such a kind family and such an easy place!

“I went to school for a year, and learned something—not much, I daresay, but something. Then I went back to the farm, alternating between that

and other places in Tyre, some better, some worse, until finally I had saved eight dollars. Then I told my mother that I was going to Thessaly seminary. She laughed at me—they all laughed—but in the end I had my way. They fitted me out with some clothes—a vest of Ezra's, an old hat, trousers cut perfectly straight and much too short, and clumsy boots two sizes too big for me, which had been bought by my stepfather in wrath at our continual trouble in the winter to get on our stiffened and shrunken boots.

“ I walked the first ten miles with a light heart. Then I began to grow frightened. I had never been to Thessaly, and though I knew pretty well from others that I should be well received, and even helped to find work to maintain myself, the prospect of the new life, now so close at hand, unnerved me. I remember once sitting down by the roadside, wavering whether to go on or not. At last I stood on the brow of the hill, and saw Thessaly lying in the valley before me. If I were to live a thousand years, I couldn't forget that sight—the great elms, the white buildings of the seminary, the air of peace and learning and plenty which it all wore. I tell you, tears came to my eyes as I looked, and more than once they've come again, when I've recalled the picture. I remember, too, that later on in the day old Dr. Burdick turned me loose in the library, as it were. There were four thousand books there, and the sight of them took my breath away. I looked at them for a long time, I know, with my mouth wide open. It

was clear to me that I should never be able to read them all—nobody, I thought, could do that—but at last I picked out a set of the encyclopædia at the end of the shelf nearest the door, and decided to begin there, and at least read as far through the room as I could."

Reuben stopped here, and relighted his cigar. "That's my story," he said after a pause, as if he had brought the recital up to date.

"I should call that only the preface—or rather, the prologue," said Horace.

"No; the rest is nothing out of the ordinary. I managed to live through the four years here—peddling a little, then travelling for a photographer in Tecumseh who made enlarged copies of old pictures collected from the farm-houses, then teaching school. I studied law first by myself, then with Ansdell at Tecumseh, and then one year in New York at the Columbia Law School. I was admitted down there, and had a fair prospect of remaining there, but I couldn't make myself like New York. It is too big; a fellow has no chance to be himself there. And so I came back here; and I haven't done so badly, all things considered."

"No, indeed; I should think not!" was Horace's hearty comment.

"But I see the way now, I think," continued Reuben, meditatively, "to doing much better still. I see a good many ways in which you can help me greatly."

"I should hope so," smiled young Mr. Boyce. "That's what I'm coming in for."

"I'm not thinking so much of the business," answered Reuben; "there need be no borrowing of trouble about that. But there are things outside that I want to do. I spoke a little about this the other day, I think."

"You said something about going into politics," replied Horace, not so heartily. The notion had already risen in his mind that the junior member of the new partnership might be best calculated to shine in the arena of the public service, if the firm was to go in for that sort of thing.

"Oh, no! not 'politics' in the sense you mean," explained Reuben. "My ambition doesn't extend beyond this village that we're in. I'm not satisfied with it; there are a thousand things that we ought to be doing better than we are, and I've got a great longing to help improve them. That was what I referred to. That is what has been in my mind ever since my return. You spoke about politics just now. Strictly speaking, 'politics' ought to embrace in its meaning all the ways by which the general good is served, and nothing else. But, as a matter of fact, it has come to mean first of all the individual good, and quite often the sacrifice of everything else. This is natural enough, I suppose. Unless a man watches himself very closely, it is easy for him to grow to attach importance to the honor and the profit of the place he holds, and to forget its responsibilities. In that way you come to have a whole community regarding an office as a prize, as a place to be fought for, and not as a place to do more work in than the

rest perform. This notion once established, why, politics comes naturally enough to mean—well, what it does mean. The politicians are not so much to blame. They merely reflect the ideas of the public. If they didn't, they couldn't stand up a minute by their own strength. You catch my idea?"

"Perfectly," said Horace, politely dissembling a slight yawn.

"Well, then, the thing to do is to get at the public mind—to get the people into the right way of regarding these things. It is no good effecting temporary reforms in certain limited directions by outbursts of popular feeling; for just as soon as the public indignation cools down, back come the abuses. And so they will do inevitably until the people get up to a calm, high level of intelligence about the management of such affairs as they have in common."

"Quite so," remarked Horace.

"Of course all this is trite commonplace," continued Reuben. "You can read it in any newspaper any day. My point is in the application of it. It's all well enough to say these things in a general way. Everybody knows they are true; nobody disputes them any more than the multiplication-table. But the exhortation does no good for that very reason. Each reader says: 'Yes, it's too bad that my neighbors don't comprehend these things better;' and there's an end to the matter. Nothing is effected, because no particular person is addressed. Now, my notion is that the way to do is to take a single small community, and go at it systematically—a

house-to-house canvass, so to speak—and labor to improve its intelligence, its good taste, its general public attitude toward its own public affairs. One can fairly count on at least some results, going at it in that way."

"No doubt," said the junior partner, smiling faintly.

"Well, then, I've got a scheme for a sort of society here—perhaps in the nature of a club—made up of men who have an interest in the town and who want to do good. I've spoken to two or three about it. Perhaps it is your coming—I daresay it is—but all at once I feel that it is time to start it. My notion is it ought to establish as a fundamental principle that it has nothing to do with anything outside Thessaly and the district roundabout. That is what we need in this country as much as anything else—the habit of minding our own immediate business. The newspapers have taught us to attend every day to what is going on in New York and Chicago and London and Paris, and every other place under the sun except our own. That is an evil. We have become like a gossiping woman who spends all her time in learning what her neighbors are doing, and lets the fire go out at home. Now, I like to think this can be altered a good deal, if we only set to work at it. You have been abroad; you have seen how other people do things, and have wider notions than the rest of us, no doubt, as to what should be done. What do you say? Does the idea attract you?"

Horace's manner confessed to some surprise. "It's a pretty large order," he said at last, smilingly. "I've never regarded myself as specially cut out for a reformer. Still, there's a good deal in what you say. I suppose it is practicable enough, when you come really to examine it."

"At all events, we can try," answered Reuben, with the glow of earnestness shining on his face. "John Fairchild is almost as fond of the notion as I am, and his paper will be of all sorts of use. Then, there's Father Chance, the Catholic priest, a splendid fellow, and Dr. Lester, and the Rev. Mr. Turner, and a number of others more or less friendly to the scheme. I'm sure they will all feel the importance of having you in it. Your having lived in Europe makes such a difference. You can see things with a new eye."

Horace gave a little laugh. "What my new eye has seen principally so far," he said, with an amused smile running through his words, "is the prevalence of tobacco juice. But of course there are hundreds of things our provincial people could learn with profit from Europe. There, for example, is the hideous cooking done at all the small places. In England, for instance, it is a delight to travel in the country, simply because the food is so good in the little rural inns; our country hotel here is a horror. Then the roads are so bad here, when they might be made so good. The farmer works out his road tax by going out and ploughing up the highway, and you break your carriage-wheels in the task of smoothing

it down again. Porters to carry one's luggage at railway stations—that's something we need, too. And the drinking of light beers and thin, wholesome wines instead of whiskey—that would do a great deal. Then men shouldn't be allowed to build those ugly flat-topped wooden houses, with tin eaves-troughs. No people can grow up to be civilized who have these abominations thrust upon their sight daily. And—oh, I had forgotten!—there ought to be a penal law against those beastly sulphur matches with black heads. I lit one by accident the other night, and I haven't got the smell of it out of my nostrils yet."

Horace ended, as he had begun, with a cheerful chuckle; but his companion, who sat looking abstractedly at the snow line of the roofs opposite, did not smile.

"Those are the minor things—the graces of life," he said, speaking slowly. "No doubt they have their place, their importance. But I am sick at heart over bigger matters—over the greed for money, the drunkenness, the indifference to real education, the neglect of health, the immodesty and commonness of our young folks' thought and intercourse, the narrowness and mental squalor of the life people live all about me—"

"It is so everywhere, my dear fellow," broke in Horace. "You are making us worse by comparison than we are."

"But we ought to be so infinitely better by comparison! And we have it really in us to be better.

Only nobody is concerned about the others ; there is no one to check the drift, to organize public feeling for its own improvement. And that"—Reuben suddenly checked himself, and looked at his new partner with a smile of wonderful sweetness—" that is what I dream of trying to do. And you are going to help me !"

He rose as he spoke, and Horace, feeling his good impulses fired in a vague way by his companion's earnestness and confidence, rose also, and stretched out his hand.

" Be sure I shall do all I can," he said, warmly, as the two shook hands.

And when young Mr. Boyce went down the narrow stairway by himself, a few minutes later, having arranged that the partnership was to begin on the approaching 1st of December, he really fancied himself as a public-spirited reformer, whose life was to be consecrated to noble deeds. He was conscious of an added expansion of breast as he buttoned his fur coat across it, and he walked down the village street in a maze of proud and pleasant reflections upon his own admirable qualities.

CHAPTER X.

MR. SCHUYLER TENNEY.

TWO or three weeks after the new sign of "Tracy & Boyce" had been hung upon the outer walls of Thessaly it happened that the senior partner was out of town for the day, and that during his absence the junior partner received an important visit from Mr. Schuyler Tenney. Although this gentleman was not a client, his talk with Horace was so long and interesting that the young lawyer felt justified in denying himself to several callers who were clients.

Mr. Schuyler Tenney, who has a considerable part to play in this story, did not upon first observations reveal any special title to prominence. To the cursory glance, he looked like any other of ten hundred hundreds of young Americans who are engaged in making more money than they need. I speak of him as young because, though there was a thick sprinkling of gray in his closely cut hair, and his age in years must have been above rather than below forty, there was nothing in his face or dress or bearing to indicate that he felt himself to be a day older than his companion. He was a slender man, with a thin, serious face, cold gray eyes, and a

trim drab mustache. Under his creaseless overcoat he wore neat gray clothes, of uniform pattern and strictly commercial aspect. He spoke with a quiet abruptness of speech as a rule, and both his rare smiles and his occasional simulations of vivacity were rather obviously artificial. Meeting Mr. Schuyler Tenney for even the first time, and looking him over, you would not, it is true, have been surprised to hear that he had just planted a dubious gold mine on the confiding English capitalists, or made a million dollars out of a three-jointed collar-button, or calmly cut out and carried off a railroad from under the very guns of the Stock Exchange. If his appearance did not suggest great exploits of this kind, it did not deny them once they were hinted by others. But the chance statement that he had privately helped somebody at his own cost without hope of reward would have given you a distinct shock.

At the present moment, Mr. Tenney was publicly known as one of the smartest and most "go-ahead" young business men of Thessaly. Dim rumors were upon the air that he was really something more than this; but as the commercial agencies had long ago given him their feeble "A 1" of superlative rating, and nothing definite was known about his outside investments, these reports only added vaguely to his respectability. He was the visible and actual head of the large wholesale hardware house of "S. Tenney & Co."

This establishment had before the war borne

another name on the big sign over its portals, that of "Sylvanus Boyce." A year or two after the war closed a new legend—"Boyce & Co."—was painted in. Thus it remained until the panic of 1873, when it underwent a transformation into "Boyce & Tenney." And now for some years the name of Boyce had disappeared altogether, and the portly, red-faced, dignified General had dwindled more and more into a position somewhere between the head book-keeper and the shipping-clerks. He was still a member of the firm, however, and it was apparently about this fact that Mr. Tenney had come to talk.

He took a seat beside Horace's desk, after shaking hands coldly with the young man, and said without ceremony :

"I haven't had a chance before to see you alone. It wouldn't do to talk over at the store—your father's in and out all the while, more out than in, by the way—and Tracy's been here every day since you joined him."

"He's out of town to-day," remarked Horace.

"So I heard. That's why I came over. Do you know that your father has overdrawn his income account by nearly eleven thousand dollars, and that the wrong side of his book hasn't got room for more than another year or so of that sort of thing? In fact, it wouldn't last that long if I wanted to be sharp with him."

The words were spoken very calmly, but they took the color as by a flash from Horace's face. He

swung his chair round, and, looking Tenney in the eyes, seemed spell-bound by what he saw there. The gaze was sustained between the two men until it grew to be like the experiment of two school-children who try to stare each other down, and under its strain the young lawyer felt himself putting forth more and more exertion to hold his own.

"I thought I would tell you," added the hardware merchant, settling himself back in the chair and crossing his thin legs, and seemingly finding it no effort to continue looking his companion out of countenance. "Yes, I thought you ought to know. I suppose he hasn't said anything to you about it."

"Not a word," answered Horace, shifting his glance to the desk before him, and striving with all his might to get his wits under control.

"That's like him. The last thing he ever wants to talk about is business, least of all his own. They tell a story about a man who used to say, 'Thank God, that's settled!' whenever he got a note renewed. He must have been a relation of the General's."

"It's Sheridan that that's ascribed to," said Horace, for the sake of saying something.

"What, 'Little Phil'? I thought he had more sense."

There was something in this display of ignorance which gave Horace the courage to face his visitor once more. He turned resolutely toward Tenney.

"Nobody knows better than you do," he said,

finding increased self-control with every word, now that the first excitement was over, "that a great deal of money has been made in that firm of yours. I shall be glad to investigate the conditions under which the business has contrived to make you rich and your partner poor."

Mr. Tenney seemed disagreeably surprised at this tone. "Don't talk nonsense," he said with passing asperity. "Of course you're welcome. The books are open to you. If a man makes four thousand dollars and spends seven thousand dollars, what on earth has his partner's affairs to do with it? I live within my income and attend to my business, and he doesn't do either. That's the long and short of it."

The two men talked together on this subject for a considerable time, Horace alternating between expressions of indignation at the fact that his father had become the unedifying tail of a concern of which he once was everything, and more or less ingenious efforts to discover what way out of the difficulty, if any, was offered. Mr. Tenney remained unmoved under both, and at last coolly quitted the topic altogether.

"You ought to do well here," he said, ignoring a point-blank question about how General Boyce's remaining interest could be protected. "Thessaly's going to have a regular boom before long. You'll see this place a city in another year or two. We've got population enough now, for that matter, only it's spread out so. How did you come to go in with Tracy?"

"Why shouldn't I? He's the best man here, and starting alone is the slowest kind of slow work."

Mr. Tenney smiled a little, and put the tips of his fingers together gently.

"Tracy and I don't hitch very well, you know," he said. "I took a downright fancy to him when I first came in from Sidon Hill, but he's such a curious, touchy sort of fellow. I asked him one day what church he'd recommend me to join; of course I was a stranger, and explained to him that what I wanted was not to make any mistake, but to get into the church where there were the most respectable people who would be of use to me; and what do you think he said? He was huffed about it—actually mad! He said he'd rather have given me a hundred dollars than had me ask him that question; and after that he was cool, and so was I, and we've never had much to say to each other since then. Of course, there's no quarrel, you know. Only it strikes me he'll be a queer sort of man to get along with. A lawyer with cranks like that—why, you never know what he'll do next."

"He's one of the best fellows alive," said Horace, with sharp emphasis.

"Why, of course he is," replied Mr. Tenney. "But that isn't business. Take the General, for instance; he's a good fellow, too—in a different kind of way, of course—and see where it's landed him. The best fellow is No. 1. Look out for him and you are all right. Tracy might be making five or six times as much as he is, if he went the right way to work. He

does more business and gets less for it than any other lawyer in town. There's no sense in that."

"Upon my word, Mr. Tenney," said Horace, after a moment's pause, in which he deliberately framed what he was going to say, "I find it difficult to understand why you thought it worth while to come here at all to-day: it surely wasn't to talk about Tracy; and the things I want to know about my father you won't discuss. What *do* you want, anyway? Wait a moment, let me finish. What I see is this: that you were a private in the regiment my father was colonel of; that he made you a sort of adjutant, or something in the nature of a clerk, and so lifted you out of the ranks; that during the war, when your health failed, he gave you a place in his business here at home, which lifted you out of the farm; that a while later he made you a partner; and that gradually the tables have been completely turned, until you are the colonel and he is the private, you are rich and he is nearly insolvent. That is what the thing sums up to in my mind. What is *your* view of it? He was good to you. Have you come to tell me that now you are going to be good to him?"

"Good God! Haven't I been good to him?" said Tenney, with real indignation. "Couldn't I have frozen him out eighteen months ago instead of taking up his overdrafts at only ten per cent. charge so as to keep him along? There isn't one man in a hundred who would have done for him what I have."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the young man.

"If the proportion was much larger, I am afraid this would be a very unhappy world to live in."

Mr. Tenney eyed the lawyer doubtfully. He had not clearly grasped the meaning of this remark, but instinct told him that it was hostile.

"All right! You may take it that way, if you like." He rose as he spoke and began buttoning his overcoat. "Only let me say this: when the smash comes, you can't say I didn't warn you. If you won't listen to me, that's *your* lookout."

"But I haven't done anything but listen to you for the last two hours," said Horace, who longed to tell his visitor to go to the devil, and yet was betrayed into signs of anxiety at the prospect of his departure. "If you'll remember, you haven't told me anything that I asked for. Heaven knows, I should be only too glad to listen, if you've got anything to say."

Mr. Tenney made a smiling movement with his thin lips and sat down again.

"I thought you would change your tune," he said, calmly. Horace offered a gesture of dissent, to which the hardware merchant paid no attention. He had measured his man, and decided upon a system of treatment. "What I really wanted," he continued, "was to look you over and hear you talk, and kind of walk around you and size you up, so to speak. You see I've only known you as a youngster—better at spending money than at making it. Now that you've started as a lawyer, I thought I'd take stock of you again, don't you see; and the best

way to sound you all around was to talk about your father's affairs."

Horace was conscious of a temptation to be angry at this cool statement, but he did not yield to it. "Then it isn't true—what you have told me?" he asked.

"Well, yes, it is, mostly," answered Mr. Tenney, again contemplating his joined finger-tips. "But it isn't of so much importance compared with some other things. There's bigger game afoot than partnerships in hardware stores."

Horace gave a little laugh of mingled irritation and curiosity. "What the devil *are* you driving at, Tenney?" he said, and swung his chair once more to face his visitor.

This time the two men eyed each other more sympathetically, and the tones of the two voices lost something of their previous reserve. Mr. Tenney himself resumed the conversation with an air of direct candor :

"I heard somebody say you rather counted on getting some of the Minster iron-works business."

"Well, the fact is, I may have said I hoped to, but nothing definite has been settled. The ladies are friends of mine : we came up from New York together last month ; but nothing was decided."

"I see," said Mr. Tenney, and Horace felt uneasily, as he looked into those sharp gray eyes, that no doubt they did see very clearly. "You were just gassing. I thought as much. There's no harm in that, only it's no good to gas with me, for there's some solid

business to be done—something mighty promising for both of us.”

“Of course I’ve no notion what you mean,” said Horace. “But it’s just as well to clear up the ground as we go along. The first experiment of yoking up Boyces and Tenneys together hasn’t turned out so admirably as to warrant me—What shall I say?”

“As to warrant you going in with your eyes shut.” Mr. Tenney supplied the lacking phrase with evident enjoyment. “Not at all, Mr. Boyce. On the contrary, what I want of you is to have your eyes peeled particularly wide open. But, first of all, Tracy mustn’t hear a breath of this whole thing.”

“Then go no further, I beg of you. I sha’n’t touch it.”

“Oh, yes, you will,” said Mr. Tenney, briskly and with confidence. “He has his own private business. Why shouldn’t you? The railroad work, for example: you don’t share in that. That is his own, and quite right, too. But that very fact leaves you free, doesn’t it, to go into speculations on your own account?”

“Speculations—yes, perhaps.”

“No ‘perhaps’ about it; of course it does. At least, you can hear what I have to say without telling him, whether you go into the thing or not; do you promise me that?”

“I don’t think I wish to promise anything,” said Horace, doubtingly.

“All right! If you won’t deal, you won’t; and I

must protect myself my own way." Mr. Tenney did not rise and again begin buttoning his coat, nor was it, indeed, necessary. There had been menace enough in his tone to effect his purpose.

"Very well, then," answered Horace, in a low voice; "if you insist, I promise."

"I shall know within half an hour if you do tell him," said Mr. Tenney, in his most affable manner; "but of course you won't."

"Of course I won't!" snapped Horace, testily.

"All right, then. So far, so good. The first thing, then, is to put the affairs of the Minster women into your hands."

Horace took his feet off the table, and looked in fixed surprise at his father's partner. "How—what do you mean?" he stammered at last, realizing, even as he spoke, that there were certain strange depths in Mr. Tenney's eyes which had been dimly apparent at the outset, and then had been for a long time veiled, and were now once more discernible. "How do you mean?"

"It can be fixed, as easy as rolling off a log. Old Clarke has gone to Florida for his health, and there's going to be a change made. A word from me can turn the whole thing over to you."

"A word from you!" Horace spoke with incredulity, but he did not really doubt. There was a revelation of reserve power in the man's glance that fascinated him.

"That's what I said. The question is whether I shall speak it or not."

"To be frank with you"—Horace smiled a little—"I hope very much that you will."

"I daresay. But have you got the nerve for it?—that's the point. Can you keep your mouth shut, and your head clear, and will you follow me without kicking or blabbing? That's what I want to know."

"And that's just what I can't tell you. I'm not going to bind myself to do unknown things." Horace said this bravely enough, but the shrewd, listening ear understood very well the lurking accent of assent.

"You needn't bind yourself to anything, except to tell Tracy nothing till I give you the word, and then only what we shall agree upon. Of course, later on he will have to know something about it. But leave that to me. And mind, mum's the word."

Mr. Tenney rose now, not tentatively, but as one who is really going. Horace sprang to his feet as well, and despite the other's declaration that he was pressed for time, and had already stayed too long, insisted on detaining him.

"What I don't understand in all this," he said, hurriedly—"for that matter the whole thing is a mystery—but what I particularly fail to see is your object in benefiting me. The two things don't hitch. You tell me that you have got my father in a hole, and then you offer me a great and substantial prize. I don't catch the sequence. You are not the man to do things for nothing. What you haven't told me is what there is in this affair for you."

Mr. Tenney seemed complimented by this trib-

ute to his commercial sense and single-mindedness. "No, I haven't told you," he said, buttoning his coat. "That'll come in due time. All you've got to do meanwhile is to keep still, and to take the thing when it comes to you. Let me know at once, and say nothing to any living soul—least of all Tracy—until you've talked with me. That oughtn't to be hard."

"And suppose I don't like the conditions?"

"Then you may lump them," said Schuyler Tenney, disclosing his small teeth again in a half-smile, as he made his way out.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. MINSTER'S NEW LEGAL ADVISER.

SOME two weeks later Mr. Horace Boyce, on returning home one evening, found on his table a note which had been delivered during the day by a servant. It was from Mrs. Minster—"Desideria Minster" she signed herself—asking him to call upon her the following afternoon. The young man read the missive over and over again by the lamplight, and if it had been a love-letter from the daughter instead of the polite business appointment by the mother, his eyes couldn't have flashed more eagerly as he took in the meaning of its words.

The meaning of its words! He thought long upon that, ruminating in his easy-chair before the fire until far past midnight, until the dainty little Japanese saucer at his side was heaped up with cigar ashes, and the air was heavy with smoke.

Evidently this summons was directly connected with the remarks made by Tenney a fortnight before. He had said the Minster business should come to him, and here it was. The fact that Mrs. Minster wrote to him at his residence, rather than at his office, was proof that she too wished to have him alone, and not the firm of Tracy & Boyce, as her adviser. That there should be this prejudice against

Reuben, momentarily disturbed the young man; but, upon examination, he found it easy to account for it. Reuben was very nice—his partner even paused for a moment to reflect how decent a fellow Reuben really was—but then, he scarcely belonged to the class of society in which people like the Boyces and Minsters moved. Naturally the millionaire widow, belonging as she did to an ancient family in the Hudson River valley, and bearing the queer name of a grandmother who had been a colonial beauty, would prefer to have as her family lawyer somebody who also had ancestors.

The invitation had its notable social side, too. There was no good in blinking the fact that his father the General—who had effected a somewhat noisy entrance to the house a half-hour ago, and the sound of whose burdened breathing now intermittently came to his ears in the silence of the night—had allowed the family status to lapse. The Boyces were not what they had been. In the course of such few calls as he had made since his return, it had been impossible for him not to detect the existence of a certain surprise that he should have called at all. Everybody, too, had taken pains to avoid reference to his father, even when the course of talk made such allusion natural. This had for the moment angered the young man, and later had not a little discouraged him. As a boy he had felt it a great thing to be the son of a general, and to find it now to be a distinct detriment was disheartening indeed. But this black-bordered, perfumed note

from Mrs. Minster put all, as by the sweep of a hand, into the background. Once he visited that proud household as a friend, once he looked Thessaly in the face as the confidential adviser of the Minster family, the Boyces were rehabilitated.

To dwell upon the thought was very pleasant, for it led the way by sweetly vagrant paths to dreams of the dark-eyed, beautiful Kate. During the past month these visions had lost color and form under the disconcerting influences just spoken of, but now they became, as if by magic, all rosy-hued and definite again. He had planned to himself on that first November day a career which should be crowned by marriage with the lovely daughter of the millions, and had made a mental march around the walls encompassing her to spy out their least defended point. Now, all at once, marvellous as it seemed, he found himself transported within the battlements. He was to be her mother's lawyer—nay, *her* lawyer as well, and to his sanguine fancy this meant everything.

Everything? The word seemed feeble. It meant one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen as his wife—a lady well-born, delicately nurtured, clever, and good; it meant vast wealth, untold wealth, with which to be not only the principal personage of these provincial parts, but a great figure in New York or Washington or Europe. He might be senator in Congress, minister to Paris, or even aspire to the towering, solitary eminence of the Presidency itself with the backing of these millions. It meant a yacht, the very dream of sea-going luxury and

speed, in which to bask under Hawaiian skies, to loiter lazily along the topaz shores of far Cathay, to flit to and fro between spice lands and cold northern seas, the whole watery globe subject to her keel. Why, there could be a castle on the Moselle, a country house in Devonshire, a flat in Paris, a villa at Mentone, a summer island home on the St. Lawrence, a mansion in New York—all together, if he liked, or as many as pleased his whim. It might be worth the while to lease a shooting in Scotland, only the mischief was that badly bred Americans, the odious *nouveaux riches*, had rather discredited the national name in the Highlands.

So the young man's fancies floated on the wreaths of scented smoke till at last he yawned in spite of himself, sated with the contemplation of the gifts the gods had brought him. He read Mrs. Minster's note once again before he went to bed, and sleep overtook his brain while it was still pleasantly musing on the choicest methods of expending the income of her millions.

Curiously enough, during all these hours of happy castle-building, the question of why Schuyler Tenney had interested himself in the young man's fortunes never once crossed that young man's mind. To be frank, the pictures he painted were all of "gentlemen" and "ladies," and his father's partner, though his help might be of great assistance at the outset, could scarcely expect to mingle in such company, even in Horace's tobacco reveries.

Neither to his father at the breakfast-table, nor to

Reuben Tracy at the office, did young Mr. Boyce next day mention the fact that he was to call on Mrs. Minster. This enforced silence was not much to his liking, primarily because his temperament was the reverse of secretive. When he had done anything or thought of doing something, the impulse to tell about it was always strong upon him. The fact that the desire to talk was not rigorously balanced by regard for the exact and prosaic truth may not have been an essential part of the trait when we come to analysis, but garrulity and exaggeration ran together in Horace's nature. To repress them now, just at the time when the most important event of his life impended, required a good deal of effort.

He had some qualms of conscience, too, so far as Reuben was concerned. Two or three things had happened within the past week which had laid him under special obligation to the courtesy and good feeling of his partner. They were not important, perhaps, but still the memory of them weighed upon his mind when, at three o'clock, he put on his coat and explained that he might not be back again that afternoon. Reuben nodded, and said, "All right: I shall be here. If so-and-so comes, I'll go over the matter and make notes for you." Then Horace longed very much to tell all about the Minster summons and the rest, and this longing arose as much from a wish to be frank and fair as from a craving to confide his secret to somebody; but he only hesitated for a second, and then went out.

Mrs. Minster received him in the chamber which

had been her husband's working room, and which still contained his desk, although it had since been furnished with book-shelves and was called the library. Horace noted, as the widow rose to greet him, that, though the desk was open, its pigeon-holes did not seem to contain many papers.

After his hostess had bidden him to be seated, and had spoken in mildly deprecating tones about the weather, she closed her resolutely lined lips, folded her hands in her lap, and looked at him in amiable suspense. As has been said before, Mrs. Minster's dark face, with its high frame of white hair and its bright black eyes, habitually produced an impression of great cleverness and alert insight, and Horace was conscious of embarrassment in finding the task of conversation devolved upon himself. He took up the burden, however, and carried it along from subject to subject until at last it seemed fitting to broach the great topic.

"I didn't get your note until evening," he said, with a polite inquiring smile.

"No, I didn't send it until after dinner," she replied, and a pause ensued.

It fortunately occurred to Horace to say he was very glad to have her call upon him always, if in any way she saw how he could serve her. As he spoke these words, he felt that they were discreet and non-committal, and yet must force her to come to the point. And they did, after a fashion.

"It is very kind of you, I'm sure," she said, graciously, and came to a full stop.

"If there is anything I can do now," Horace remarked tentatively.

"Well—oh yes! What I wanted to ask you was, do you know the Wendovers?"

"I don't think I do," murmured the young man, with a great sinking of the heart.

"They're New York people," the lady explained.

"I know almost nobody in New York," answered Horace gloomily. "Wendover? No, I am quite sure the name is new to me."

"That is curious," said Mrs. Minster. She took a letter up from the desk. "This is from Judge Wendover, and it mentions you. I gathered from it that he knew you quite well."

Oh, shades of the lies that might have been told, if one had only known!

Horace swiftly ransacked his brain for a way out of this dilemma. Evidently this letter bore upon his selection as her lawyer. He guessed rightly that it had been written at Tenney's suggestion and by some one who had Mrs. Minster's confidence. Obviously this some one was of the legal profession. That was his cue.

"The name does sound familiar, on second thought," he said. "I daresay it is, if I could only place it. You see, I had a number of offers to enter legal firms in New York, and in that way I saw a good many people for a few minutes, you know, and quite probably I've forgotten some of their names. They would remember me, of course, but I might confuse them one with another, don't you see?"

Strange, I don't fix the man you mean. Was he a middle-aged man, grayish hair, well dressed?"

"Yes, that describes him." She did not add that it would equally describe seven out of every ten other men called "judge" throughout the United States.

"Now I place him," said Horace triumphantly. "There was some talk of my going into his office as a junior partner. Mutual friends of ours proposed it, I remember. But it didn't attract me. Curious that I should have forgotten his name. One's memory plays such whimsical tricks, though."

"I didn't know Judge Wendover was practising law," said Mrs. Minster. "He never was much of a lawyer. He was county judge once down in Peekskill, about the time I was married, but he didn't get reelected; and I thought he gave it all up when he went to New York."

"If it's the man I mean," put in Horace, groping his way despairingly, "there wasn't much business in his office. That is why I didn't go in, I daresay: it wouldn't be worth my while unless he himself was devoted to the law, and carried on a big practice."

"I daresay it's the same man," remarked Mrs. Minster. "He probably *would* have a kind of law office. They generally do."

"Well, may I ask," Horace ventured after another pause, "in what connection he mentions my name?"

"He recommends me to consult you about affairs—to—well, how shall I say it?—to make you my lawyer?"

Eureka! The words were out, and the difficult passage about Judge What's-his-name was left safely behind. Horace felt his brain swimming on a sea of exaltation, but he kept his face immobile, and bowed his head with gravity.

"I am very young for so serious a responsibility, I'm afraid," he said modestly.

The widow reassured him with a smile. "There isn't really much to do," she answered. "And somebody would have to learn what there is; and you can do that as well as any one else, better than a stranger. The difficulty is," she spoke more slowly, and Horace listened with all his ears: "you have a partner, I'm told."

The young man did not hesitate for an instant. "Only in a limited way," he replied. "Mr. Tracy and I have combined on certain lines of work where two heads are better than one, but we each keep distinct our own private practice. It is much better."

"I certainly prefer it," said Mrs. Minster. "I am glad to hear you keep separate. I do not know Mr. Tracy, and, indeed, he is very highly spoken of as a *lawyer*; but certain things I have heard—social matters, I mean—"

The lady broke off discreetly. She could not tell this young man what she had heard about that visit to the Lawton house. Horace listened to her without the remotest notion of her meaning, and so could only smile faintly and give the least suggestion of a sigh. Clearly he must throw Reuben overboard.

"We can't have everything in this world just to

our minds," he said judicially, and it seemed to him to cover the case with prudent vagueness.

"I suppose you thought the partnership would be a good thing?" she asked.

"At the time—yes," answered Horace. "And, to be fair, it really has some advantages. Mr. Tracy is a prodigious worker, for one thing, and he is very even-tempered and willing; so that the burden of details is taken off my shoulders to a great extent, and that disposes one to overlook a good many things, you know."

Mrs. Minster nodded appreciation. She also knew what it was to delight in relief from the burden of details, and she said to herself that fortunately Mr. Boyce would thus have the more leisure to devote to the affairs of the Minsters.

Into their further talk it is not needful to pursue the lady and her lawyer. She spoke only in general terms, outlining her interests and investments which required attention, and vaguely defining what she expected him to do. Horace listened very closely, but beyond a nebulous comprehension of the existence of a big company and a little company, which together controlled the iron-works and its appurtenances, he learned next to nothing. One of the first things which she desired of Horace was, however, that he should go to Florida and talk the whole subject over with Mr. Clarke, and to this he gladly assented.

"I will write to him that you are coming," she said, as she rose. "I may tell you that he person-

ally preferred Mr. Tracy as his successor; but, as I have told you—well, there were reasons why—”

Horace made haste to bow and say “quite so,” and thus spare Mrs. Minster the trouble of explanations. “Perhaps it will be better to say nothing to any one until I have returned from Florida,” he added, as a parting suggestion, and it had her assent.

The young man walked buoyantly down the gravel path and along the streets, his veins fairly tingling with excitement and joy. The great prize had come to him—wealth, honor, fame, were all within his grasp. He thought proudly, as he strode along, of what he would do after his marriage. Even the idea of hyphenating the two names in the English fashion, Minster-Boyce, came into his mind, and was made welcome. Perhaps, though, it couldn’t well be done until his father was dead; and that reminded him—he really must speak to the General about his loose behavior.

Thus Horace exultantly communed with his happy self, and formed resolutions, dreamed dreams, discussed radiant probabilities as he walked, until his abstracted eye was suddenly, insensibly arrested by the sight of a familiar sign across the street—“S. Tenney & Co.” Then for the first time he remembered his promise, and the air grew colder about him as he recalled it. He crossed the road after a moment’s hesitation, and entered the hardware store.

Mr. Tenney was alone in the little office parti-

tioned off by wood and glass from the open store. He received the account given by Horace of his visit to the Minster mansion with no indication of surprise, and with no outward sign of satisfaction.

"So far, so good," he said, briefly. Then, after a moment's meditation, he looked up sharply in the face of the young man, who was still standing: "Did you say anything about your terms?"

"Of course not. How could I? You don't show price-lists like a storekeeper, in the *law*!"

Mr. Tenney smiled just a little at Horace's haughty tone—a smile of furtive amusement. "It's just as well," he said. "I'll talk with you about that later. The old lady's rather close-fisted. We may make a point there—by sending in bills much smaller than old Clarke's used to be. I ought to have told you about that. Luckily it wasn't needed."

The matter-of-fact way in which Mr. Tenney used this "we" grated disagreeably on the young man's ear, suggesting as it did a new partnership uncomfortably vague in form; but he deemed it wise not to touch upon the subject. His next question, as to the identity of Judge Wendover, brought upon the stage, however, still a third partner in the shadowy firm to which he had committed himself.

"Oh, Wendover's in with us. He's all right," replied Schuyler Tenney, lightly. "Never heard of him, eh? He's the president of the Thessaly Manufacturing Company. You'll hear a good deal about *that* later on." The speaker showed his teeth again

by a smiling movement of the lips at this assurance, and Horace somehow felt his uneasiness growing.

"She wants me to go to Florida to see Clarke, and talk things over," he said.

"Just so. That's important. We must consider all that very carefully before you go. Clarke requires handling. Leave that to me. I'll think out what you are to tell him."

Horace was momentarily shrinking in importance before his own mental vision; and, though he resented it, he could not but submit. "I suppose I'd better make some other excuse to Tracy about the Florida trip," he said, almost deferentially; "what do you think?"

"Oh, you think so, do you?" Mr. Tenney was interested, and made a renewed scrutiny of the young man's face. "Perhaps. I'll think about it, and let you know to-morrow. Look in about this time, and don't say anything till then. So long!"

Thus dismissed, Horace took his leave, and it was not until he had nearly reached his home that the thoughts chasing each other in his mind began to take on once more roseate hues and hopeful outlines.

Mr. Tenney watched his partner's son through the partition until he was out of sight, and then smiled at the papers on his desk in confidence. "He's ready to lie at a minute's notice," he mused; "offered on his own hook to lie to Tracy. That's all right—only he mustn't try it on with me!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE THESSALY CITIZENS' CLUB.

THE village of Thessaly took no pains to conceal the fact that it was very proud of itself. What is perhaps more unique is that the farming people round about, and even the smaller and rival hamlets scattered through the section, cordially recognized Thessaly's right to be proud, and had a certain satisfaction in themselves sharing that pride.

Lest this should breed misconception and paint a more halcyon picture of these minor communities than is deserved, let it be explained that they were not without their vehement jealousies and bickerings among one another. Often there arose between them sore contentions over questions of tax equalization and over political neglects and intrigues; and here, too, there existed, in generous measure, those queer parochial prejudices—based upon no question whatever, and defying alike inquiry and explanation—which are so curious a heritage from the childhood days of the race. No long-toed brachycephalous cave-dweller of the stone age could have disliked the stranger who hibernated in the holes on the other side of the river more heartily than the people of Octavius disliked those of Sidon. In the hop-picking

season the young men of these two townships always fell to fighting when they met, and their pitched conflicts in and around the Half-way House near Tyre, when dances were given there in the winter, were things to talk about straight through until hoeing had begun in the spring. There were many other of these odd and inexplicable aversions—as, for instance, that which had for many years impelled every farmer along the whole length of the Nedahma Creek road to vote against any and all candidates nominated from Juno Mills, a place which they scarcely knew and had no earthly reason for disliking. But in such cases no one asked for reasons. Matters simply stood that way, and there was nothing more to be said.

But everybody was proud of Thessaly. Neighbors took almost as much pleasure in boasting of its wealth and activity, and prophesying its future greatness, as did its own sons. The farmers when they came in gazed with gratified amazement at the new warehouses, the new chimneys, the new factory walls that were rising everywhere about them, and returned more satisfied than ever that “Thessaly was just a-humming along.” Dearborn County had always heretofore been a strictly agricultural district, full of rich farm-lands and well-to-do farm-owners, and celebrated in the markets of New York for the excellence of its dairy products. Now it seemed certain that Thessaly would soon be a city, and it was already a subject for congratulation that the industries which were rooting, sprouting, or bearing fruit there had

given Dearborn County a place among the dozen foremost manufacturing shires in the State.

The farmers were as pleased over this as any one else. It was true that they were growing poorer year by year ; that their lands were gradually becoming covered with a parchment film of mortgages, more deadly than sorrel or the dreaded black-moss ; that the prices of produce had gone down on the one hand as much as the cost of living and of labor had risen on the other ; that a rich farmer had become a rarity in a district which once was controlled by the princes of herds and waving fields : but all the same the agriculturists of Dearborn County were proud of Thessaly, of its crowds of foreign-born operatives, its smoke-capped chimneys, and its noisy bustle. They marched almost solidly to the polls to vote for the laws which were supposed to protect its industries, and they consoled themselves for falling incomes and increased expenditure by roseate pictures of the great "home market" which Thessaly was to create for them when it became a city.

The village had once been very slow indeed. For many years it had been scarcely known to the outside world save as the seat of a seminary of something more than local repute. This institution still nestled under the brow of the hill whence the boy Reuben Tracy had looked with fondly wistful vision down upon it, but it was no longer of much importance. It was yet possible to discern in the quiet streets immediately adjoining the seminary enclosure, with their tall arched canopies of elm-boughs, and old-fashioned

white houses with verandas and antique gardens, some remains of the academic character that this institution had formerly imparted to the whole village. But the centre of activity and of population had long since moved southward, and around this had grown up a new Thessaly, which needed neither elms nor gardens, which had use for its children at the loom or the lathe when the rudiments of the common school were finished, and which alike in its hours of toil and of leisure was anything rather than academic. I suppose that in this modern Thessaly, with its factories and mills, its semi-foreign saloons, and its long streets of uniformly ugly cottage dwellings, there were many hundreds of adults who had no idea whether the once-famous Thessaly seminary was still open or not.

If Thessaly had had the time and inclination for a serious study of itself, this decadence of the object of its former pride might have awakened some regret. The seminary, which had been one of the first in the land to open its doors to both sexes, had borne an honorable part in the great agitation against slavery that preceded the war. Some of its professors had been distinguished abolitionists—of the kind who strove, suffered, and made sacrifices when the cause was still unpopular, yet somehow fell or were edged out of public view once the cause had triumphed and there were rewards to be distributed, and they had taken the sentiment of the village with them in those old days. Then there was a steady demand upon the seminary library, which was open

to householders of the village, for good books. Then there was maintained each winter a lecture course, which was able, not so much by money as by the weight and character of its habitual patrons, to enrich its annual lists with such names as Emerson, Burritt, Phillips, Curtis, and Beecher. At this time had occurred the most sensational episode in the history of the village—when the rumor spread that a runaway negro was secreted somewhere about the seminary buildings, and a pro-slavery crowd came over from Tyre to have him out and to vindicate upon the persons of his protectors the outraged majesty of the Fugitive Slave law, and the citizens of Thessaly rose and chased back the invaders with celerity and emphasis.

But all this had happened so long ago that it was only vaguely remembered now. There were those who still liked to recall those days and to tell stories about them, but they had only themselves for listeners. The new Thessaly was not precisely intolerant of the history of this ante-bellum period, but it had fresher and more important matters to think of; and its customary comment upon these legends of the slow, one-horse past was, "Things have changed a good deal since then," offered with a smile of distinct satisfaction.

Yes, things had changed. Stephen Minster's enterprise in opening up the iron fields out at Juno, and in building the big smelting-works on the outskirts of Thessaly, had altered everything. The branch road to the coal district which he called into

existence lifted the village at once into prominence as a manufacturing site. Other factories were erected for the making of buttons, shoes, Scotch-caps, pasteboard boxes, matches, and a number of varieties of cotton cloths. When this last industry appeared in the midst of them, the people of Thessaly found their heads fairly turned. To be lords of iron and cotton both!

This period of industrial progress, of which I speak with, I hope, becoming respect and pride, had now lasted some dozen years, and, so far from showing signs of interruption, there were under discussion four or five new projects for additional trades to be started in the village, which would be decided upon by the time the snow was off the ground. During these years, Thessaly had more than quadrupled its population, which was now supposed to approximate thirteen thousand, and might be even more. There had been considerable talk for the past year or two about getting a charter as a city from the legislature, and undoubtedly this would soon be done. About this step there were, however, certain difficulties, more clearly felt than expressed. Not even those who were most exultant over Thessaly's splendid advance in wealth and activity were blind to sundry facts written on the other side of the ledger.

Thessaly had now some two thousand voters, of whom perhaps two-fifths had been born in Europe. It had a saloon for every three hundred and fifty inhabitants, and there was an uneasy sense of connection between these two facts which gave rise to

awkward thoughts. The village was fairly well managed by its trustees; the electorate insisted upon nothing save that they should grant licenses liberally, and, this apart, their government did not leave much to be desired. But how would it be when the municipal honors were taken on, when mayor, aldermen and all the other officers of the new city, with enlarged powers of expenditure and legislation, should be voted for? Whenever the responsible business men of Thessaly allowed their minds to dwell upon a forecast of what this board of aldermen would probably be like, they frankly owned to themselves that the prospect was not inviting. But as a rule they did not say so, and the village was drifting citywards on a flowing tide.

It was just before Christmas that Reuben Tracy took the first step toward realizing his dream of making this Thessaly a better place than it was. Fourteen citizens, all more or less intimate friends of his, assembled at his office one evening, and devoted some hours to listening to and discussing his plans.

An embarrassment arose almost at the outset through the discovery that five or six of the men present thought Thessaly was getting on very well as it was, and had assumed that the meeting was called for the purpose of arranging a citizens' movement to run the coming spring elections for trustees in the interest of good government—by which they of course understood that they were to be asked to

take office. The exposure of this mistake threatened for a little time to wreck the purpose of the gathering. Mr. Jones, a gentleman who made matches, or rather had just taken a handsome sum from the great Ruby Loco-foco Trust as his reward for ceasing to manufacture them, was especially disposed to resent what Reuben said about the moral and material state of the village. He insisted that it was the busiest and most progressive town in that whole section of the State; it had six streets well paved, was lighted with gas, had no disorderly houses to speak of, and turned out an annual production of manufactures worth two and a half times as much as the industrial output of any other place of its size in the State. He had the figures at his tongue's end, and when he finished with a spirited sentence about being proud of his native town, and about birds fouling their own nests, it looked as if he had the sense of the little assemblage with him.

Reuben Tracy found it somewhat difficult to reply to an unexpected attack of this nature. He was forced to admit the truth of everything his critic had said, and then to attempt once more to show why these things were not enough. Father Chance, the Catholic priest, a broad-shouldered, athletic young man, who preached very commonplace sermons but did an enormous amount of pastoral work, took up the speaking, and showed that his mind ran mainly upon the importance of promoting total abstinence. John Fairchild, the editor and owner of Thessaly's solitary daily paper, a candid and warm-

hearted man, whose heterodoxy on the tariff question gave concern to the business men of the place, but whose journal was honest and popular, next explained what his views were, and succeeded in precipitating, by some chance remark, a long, rambling, and irrelevant debate on the merits of protection and the proper relations between capital and labor. To illustrate his position on these subjects, and on the general question of Thessaly's condition, Mr. Burdick, the cashier of the Dearborn County Bank, next related how he was originally opposed to the Bland Silver bill, and detailed the mental processes by which his opinion had finally become reversed. The Rev. Dr. Turner, the rector of St. Matthew's, a mildly paternal gentleman, who seemed chiefly occupied by the thought that he was in the same room with a Catholic priest, tentatively suggested a bazaar, with ladies and the wives of workingmen mingled together on the committee, and smiled and coughed confusedly when this idea was received in absolute silence.

It was Dr. Lester, a young physician who had moved into the village only a few years before, but was already its leading medical authority, who broke this silence by saying, with a glance which, slowly circling the room, finally rested on Reuben Tracy: "All this does not help us. Our views on all sorts of matters are interesting, no doubt, but they are not vital just now. The question is not so much why you propose something, but what do you propose?"

The answer came before the person addressed had arranged his words, and it came from Horace Boyce. This young gentleman had, with a self-restraint which he himself was most surprised at, taken no part in the previous conversation.

"I think this is the idea," he said now, pulling his chair forward into the edge of the open space under the light, and speaking with easy distinctness and fluency. "It will be time enough to determine just what we will do when we have put ourselves in the position to act together upon what we may decide to do. We are all proud and fond of our village; we are at one in our desire to serve and advance its interests. That is a platform broad enough, and yet specific enough, for us to start upon. Let us accept it as a beginning, and form an association, club, society—whatever it may be called—with this primary purpose in view: to get together in one body the gentlemen who represent what is most enlightened, most public-spirited, and at once most progressive and most conservative in Thessaly. All that we need at first is the skeleton of an organization, the most important feature of which would be the committee on membership. Much depends upon getting the right kind of men interested in the matter. Let the objects and work of this organization unfold and develop naturally and by degrees. It may take the form of a mechanics' institute, a library, a gymnasium, a system of coffee-taverns, a lecture course with elevating popular exhibitions; and so I might go on, enumerating all the admirable things which

similar bodies have inaugurated in other villages, both here and in Europe. I have made these matters, both at home and abroad, a subject of considerable observation ; I am enthusiastic over the idea of setting some such machinery in motion here, and I am perfectly confident, once it is started, that the leading men of Thessaly will know how to make it produce results second to none in the whole world-wide field of philanthropic endeavor."

When young Mr. Boyce had finished, there was a moment's hush. Then Reuben Tracy began to say that this expressed what he had in mind ; but, before he had the words out, the match manufacturer exclaimed :

"Whatever kind of organization we have, it will need a president, and I move that Mr. Horace Boyce be elected to that place."

Two or three people in the shadows behind clapped their hands. Horace protested that it was premature, irregular, that he was too young, etc. ; but the match-maker was persistent, and on a vote there was no opposition. The Rev. Dr. Turner ceased smiling for a moment or two while this was going on, and twirled his thumbs nervously ; but nobody paid any attention to him, and soon his face lightened again as his name was placed just before that of Father Chance on the general committee.

Once started, the work of organization went forward briskly. It was decided at first to call the organization the "Thessaly Reform Club," but two

manufacturers suggested that this was only one remove from styling it a Cobden Club outright, and so the name was altered to "Thessaly Citizens' Club," and all professed themselves pleased. When the question of a treasurer came up, Reuben Tracy's name was mentioned, but some one asked if it would look just the thing to have the two principal officers in one firm, and so the match-maker consented to take the office instead. Even the committee on by-laws would have been made up without Reuben had not Horace interfered; then, upon John Fairchild's motion, he was made the chairman of that committee, while Fairchild himself was appointed secretary.

When the meeting had broken up, and the men were putting on their overcoats and lighting fresh cigars, Dr. Lester took the opportunity of saying in an undertone to Reuben: "Well, what do you think of it?"

"It seems to have taken shape very nicely. Don't you think so?"

"Hm-m! There's a good deal of Boyce in it so far, and damned little Tracy!"

Reuben laughed. "Oh, don't be disturbed about that. He's the best man for the place. He's studied all these things in Europe—the coöperative institutes in the English industrial towns, and so on; and he'll put his whole soul into making this a success."

The doctor sniffed audibly at this, but offered no further remark. Later on, however, when he was

walking along in the crisp moonlight with John Fairchild, he unburdened his mind.

"It was positively sickening," he growled, biting his cigar angrily, "to see the way that young cub of a Boyce foisted himself upon the concern. I'd bet any money he put up the whole thing with Jones. They nominated each other for president and treasurer—didn't you notice that?"

"Yes, I noticed it," replied Fairchild, with something between a sigh and a groan. After a moment he added: "Do you know, I'm afraid Rube will find himself in a hole with that young man, before he gets through with him. It may sound funny to you, but I'm deucedly nervous about it. I'd rather see a hundred Boyces broiled alive than have harm come to so much as Tracy's little finger."

"What could have ailed him to go in blindfold like that into the partnership? He knew absolutely nothing of the fellow."

"I've told him a hundred times, he's got no more notion of reading characters than a mulley cow. Anybody can go up to him and wheedle his coat off his back, if he knows the first rudiments of the confidence game. It seems, in this special instance, that he took a fancy to Boyce because he saw him give two turkeys to old Ben Lawton, who'd lost his money at a turkey-shoot and got no birds. He thought it was generous and noble and all that. So far as I can make out, that was his only reason."

Dr. Lester stopped short and looked at his companion. Then he burst out in a loud, shrill laugh,

which renewed itself in intermittent gurgles of merriment so many times that Fairchild finally found them monotonous, and interposed a question :

"There's something besides fun in all this, Lester. What is it?"

"It isn't professional to tell, my dear fellow, but there *is* something—you're right—and we are Reuben's friends against all the world; and this is what I laughed at."

Then in a low tone, as if even the white flaring moon and the jewelled stars in the cold sky had ears, he told his secret to his friend—a secret involving one small human being of whose very existence Mr. Horace Boyce had no knowledge.

"The girl has come back here to Thessaly, you know," concluded the doctor.

Fairchild nodded assent. Then after a moment's thought he said :

"It's too bad we changed the name of the organization. That cuss *ought* to be the president of a Reform Club!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE MILLIONS.

A YOUNG woman who is in her twenty-third year, who is possessed of bright wits, perfect health, great personal beauty, and a fortune of nearly a million of dollars in her own right, and who moreover is untroubled by a disquieting preference for any single individual in the whole army of males, ought not, by all the rules, to be unhappy.

Kate Minster defied the rules, and moped. Not infrequently she found herself in the mood to think, "Now I realize how rich girls must feel when they commit themselves to entering a convent." Oftener still, perhaps, she caught her tongue framing impatient or even petulant answers to her mother, to her mother's friends, to everybody, in truth, save her sister Ethel. The conviction that she was bad-tempered had begun to enter her mind as it were without rapping, and with the air of a familiar. By dint of repeated searchings in the mirror, she had almost discovered a shadow between her brows which would presently develop into a wrinkle, and notify to the whole world her innate vixenish tendencies. And indeed, with all this brooding which grew upon her, it was something of a triumph for youth that the wrinkle had still failed to come.

It is said that even queens yawn sometimes, when nobody is looking. But at least they have work to do, such as it is, and grow tired. Miss Kate had no work of any sort, and was utterly wearied. The vacuity of existence oppressed her with formless fatigue, like a nightmare.

The mischief was that all of his own tremendous energy which Stephen Minster had transmitted to the generation following him was concentrated in this eldest child of his. The son had been a light-headed weakling. The other daughter, Ethel, was as fragile and tenderly delicate as a Christmas rose. But Kate had always been the strong one of the family, physically vigorous, restive under unintelligent discipline, rebellious to teachers she disliked, and proudly confident of her position, her ability, and the value of her plans and actions. She had loved her father passionately, and never ceased to mourn that, favorite of his though she was, business cares had robbed her of so much of his company for years before his death. As a girl she had dreamed her dreams—bold, sweepingly ambitious visions they were; but this father of whom she was so proud, this powerful father who had so manfully subdued things under his feet, was always the one who was to encompass their fulfilment. When he died, her aerial castles at a stroke tumbled into chaos. All her plans and aspirations had turned upon him as their pivot. Without him all was disorganized, shapeless, incomprehensible.

Nearly three years had gone by, and still matters

about her and possibilities before her alike refused to take on definite outlines. She still did not do to-day the things she wanted to do, yet felt as powerless as ever to tell what her purposes for to-morrow clearly were. All the conditions for achievement were hers to command, and there was nothing to achieve.

There was something alike grotesque and pathetic in the record of her attempts to find work. She had gathered at considerable expense all the books and data she could learn about relating to the life and surroundings of Lady Arabella Stuart, and had started to write what should be the authoritative work on the subject, only to discover that she did not know how to make a book, and would not want to make that kind of a book if she had known how. She had begun collections of orchids, of coins, of engraved portraits, of cameos, and, at varying times, of kindred other trifles, and then on some gray and rainy morning had found herself impelled to turn upon each of these in its order with disgust and wrath. For music she unluckily had no talent, and a very exhaustive and costly outfit of materials for a painter's studio amused her for less than one short month. She had a considerable feeling for color, but was too impatient to work laboriously at the effort to learn to draw; and so she hated her pictures while they were being painted, and laughed scornfully at them afterward. She wrote three or four short stories, full of the passions she had read about, and was chagrined to get them back from a

whole group of polite but implacable editors. Embroidery she detested, and gardening makes one's back ache.

Miss Minster was perfectly aware that other young ladies, similarly situated, got on very well indeed, without ever fluttering so much as a feather for a flight toward the ether beyond their own personal atmosphere; but she did not clearly comprehend what it was that they did like. She had seen something of their daily life—perhaps more of their amusements than of their occupations—and it was not wholly intelligible to her. They seemed able to extract entertainment from a host of things which were to her almost uninteresting. During her few visits to New York, Newport, and Saratoga, for the most part made during her father's lifetime, people had been extremely kind to her, and had done their best to make her feel that there existed for her, ready made, a very notable social position. She had been invited to more dinners than there were days at her disposal in which to eat them; she had been called with something like public acclamation the belle of sundry theatre parties; her appearance and her clothes had been canvassed with distinctly over-free flattery in one or two newspapers; she had danced a little, made a number of calls, suffered more than was usual from headaches, and yawned a great deal. The women whom she met all seemed to take it for granted that she was in the seventh heaven of enjoyment; and the young men with huge expanses of shirt front, who sprang up everywhere

in indefinite profusion about her, like the clumps of white double-hollyhocks in her garden at home, were evidently altogether sincere in their desire to please her. But the women all received the next comer with precisely the smile they gave her; and the young men, aside from their eagerness to devise and provide diversions for her, and the obvious honesty of their liking for her, were deadly commonplace. She was always glad when it was time to return to Thessaly.

Yet in this same village she was practically secluded from the society of her own generation. There were not a few excellent families in Thessaly who were on calling and even dining terms with the Minsters, but there had never been many children in these purely native households, and now most of the grown-up sons had gone to seek fortune in the great cities, and most of the girls had married either men who lived elsewhere or men who did not quite come within the Minsters' social pale.

It was a wearisome and vexatious thing, she said to herself very often, this barrier of the millions beyond which she must not even let her fancy float, and which encompassed her solitude like a prison wall. Often, too, she approached the point of meditating revolt, but only to realize with a fresh sigh that the thought was hopeless. What could she do? If the people of her own class, even with the advantages of amiable manners, cleanliness, sophisticated speech, and refined surroundings, failed to interest her, it was certain enough that the others would be

even less tolerable. And she for whose own protection these impalpable defences against unpleasant people, adventurers, fortune-hunters, and the like, had all been reared, surely she ought to be the last in the world to wish them levelled. And then she would see, of course, that she did not wish this ; yet, all the same, it was very, very dull !

There must be whole troops of good folk somewhere whom she could know with pleasure and gain—nice women who would like her for herself, and clever men who would think it worth their while to be genuine with her, and would compliment her intelligence by revealing to it those high thoughts, phrased in glowing language, of which the master sex at its best is reputed to be capable—if only they would come in her way. But there were no signs betokening their advent, and she did not know where to look for them, and could not have sallied forth in the quest if she had known ; and oh, but this was a weary world, and riches were mere useless rubbish, and life was a mistake !

Patient, soft-eyed Ethel was the one to whom such of these repinings against existence as found their way into speech were customarily addressed. She was sympathetic enough, but hers was a temperament placid as it was tender, and Kate could do everything else save strike out sparks from it when her mood was for a conflagration. As for the mother, she knew in a general way that Kate had a complaining and unsatisfied disposition, and had always had it, and accepted the fact much as she did that of

Ethel's poor health—as something which could not be helped, and therefore need not be worried about. Hence, she was but rarely made the confidante of her elder daughter's feelings, but Kate occasionally railed at destiny in the hearing of Miss Tabitha Wilcox, whom she liked sometimes much more than at others, but always enough to have a certain satisfaction in mildly bullying her.

"You know as well as I do, Tabitha," said Miss Kate one afternoon in January, rising from the couch where she had been lounging in sheer idleness, and walking over to the window with slow indolence of gait, "that our whole life here is simply ridiculous. We girls have lived here in Thessaly ever since we were little children, and if we left the place for good to-morrow, positively there would not be a single personal tie to be broken. So far as making friends go, we might as well have lived in the moon, where I believe it is settled that there are no people at all. And pray what is there in life worth having but friends—I mean real friends?"

"I had supposed," began the little lady with the iron-gray curls, who sat primly beside the window at one corner of the great drawing-room—"I had supposed that *I* would be reckoned among—"

"Oh, don't take me up in that way, Tabitha! Of course, I reckoned you—you know that well enough—that is, you count and you don't count, for you are like one of us. Besides, I was thinking of people of my own age. There are some few nice girls here, but they are never frank with me as they

are among themselves; I suppose because they are always thinking that I am rich. And how many young men do I know? Say ten, and I always think I can see dollar-marks shining in their eyes whenever I look at them. Certainly they have nothing else inside their heads that would shine."

"I am sure you exaggerate their—"

"Oh, no, Tabitha! Don't be sure of any such thing. They couldn't be exaggerated; they wouldn't bear it. Candidly now, can you think of a single man in the place whom you would like to hear mentioned as entertaining the shadow of a hope that some time he might be—what shall I say?—allowed to cherish the possibility of becoming the—the son-in-law of my mother?"

"I didn't think your mind ran on such—"

"And it doesn't," broke in the girl, "not in the least, I assure you. I put it in that way merely to show you what I mean. You can't associate on terms of equality with people who would almost be put out of the house if they ventured to dream of asking you to marry them. Both sides are at a disadvantage. Don't you see what I mean? There is a wall between them. That is why I say we have no friends here; money brings us nothing that is of value; this isn't like a home at all."

"Why, and everybody is talking of how much Thessaly has improved of late years. And quite nice people coming in, too! They say the Bidwells, who already talk of building a second factory for their button business—they say they moved in very

good society indeed at Troy. I've met Mrs. Bidwell twice at church sociables—the stout lady, you know, with the false front. They seem quite a knowable family.”

Kate did not reply, but drummed on the window-pane and watched the fierce quarrels of some English sparrows flitting about on the frozen snow outside. Miss Tabitha went on with more animation than sequence :

“Of course you've heard of the club they're going to start, or have started ; they call it the Thessaly Citizens' Club.”

“Who ? the Bidwells ? ”

“Oh, dear, no ! The young men of the village—or I suppose it will soon be a city now. They tell all sorts of stories about what this club is going to do ; reform the whole town, if you believe them. I always understood a club was for men to drink and play cards and sit up to all hours in, but it seems this is to be different. At any rate, several clergymen, Dr. Turner among them, have joined it, and Horace Boyce was elected president.”

The sparrows had disappeared, but Kate made no answer, and musingly kept her eyes fastened on the snow where the disagreeable birds had been.

“Now, *there's* a young man,” said Miss Tabitha, after a pause. Still no comment came from the window, and so the elder maiden drifted forward :

“It's all Horace Boyce now. You don't hear anything else. Everybody is saying he will soon be our leading man. They tell me that he speaks beauti-

fully—in public, I mean—and he is so good-looking and so bright; they all expect he'll make quite a mark when court sits next month. I suppose he'll throw his partner altogether into the shade; everybody at least seems to think so. And Reuben Tracy had *such* a chance—once."

The tall, dark girl at the window still did not turn, but she took up the conversation with an accent of interest.

"*Had* a chance—what do you mean? I've never heard a word against him, except that idle story you told here once."

"Idle or not, Kate, you can't deny that the girl is here."

Kate laughed, in scornful amusement. "No; and so winter is here, and you are here, and the snow-birds are here, and all the rest of it. But what does that go to show?"

"And that reminds me," exclaimed Tabitha, leaning forward in her chair with added eagerness—"now, what *do* you think?"

"The processes by which you are reminded of things, Tabitha, are not fit subjects for light and frivolous brains like mine."

"You laugh; but you really never *could* guess it in all your born days. That Lawton girl—she's actually a tenant of mine; or, that is, she rented from another party, but she's in *my house*! You can just fancy what a state I was in when I heard of it."

"How do you mean? What house?"

"You know those places of mine on Bridge Street

—rickety old houses they're getting to be now, though I must say they've stood much better than some built years and years after my father put them up, for he was the most thorough man about such things you ever saw, and as old Major Schoonmaker once said of him, he—"

"Yes, but what about that—that girl?"

Tabitha returned to her subject without impatience. All her life she had been accustomed to being pulled up and warned from rambling, and if her hearers neglected to do this the responsibility for the omission was their own.

"Well, you know the one-story-and-attic place, painted brown, and flat-roofed, just beyond where the Truemans live. It seems as if I had had more than forty tenants for that place. Everybody that can't keep a store anywhere, and make a living, seems to hit upon that identical building to fail in. Old Ikey Peters was the last; he started a sort of fish store, along with peanuts and toys and root beer, and he came to me a month or two back and said it was no go; he couldn't pay the rent any more, and he'd got a job as night watchman: so if he found another tenant, might he turn it over to him until the first of May, when his year would be up? and I said, 'Yes, if it isn't for a saloon.' And next I heard he had rented the place to a woman who had come from Tecumseh to start a milliner's shop. I went past there a few days afterward, and I saw Ben Lawton fooling around inside with a jack-plane, fixing up a table; but even then I hadn't a suspicion

in the world. It must have been a week later that I went by again, and there I saw the sign over the door, 'J. Lawton—Millinery;' and would you believe it, even *then* I didn't dream of what was up! So in walks I, to say 'how do you do,' and lo and behold! there was Ben Lawton's eldest girl running the place, and quite as much at home as I was. You could have knocked me over with a feather!"

"Quite appropriately, in a milliner's shop, too," said Kate, who had taken a chair opposite to Tabitha's and seemed really interested in her narrative.

"Well, there she was, anyway."

"And what happened next? Did you faint or run away, or what?"

"Oh, she was quite civil, I must say. She recognized me—she used to see me at my sister's when she worked there—and asked me to sit down, and explained that she hadn't got entirely settled yet. Yes, I must admit that she was polite enough."

"How tiresome of her! Now, if she had thrown boiling water on you, or even made faces at you, it would have been something like. But to ask you to sit down! And *did* you sit down, Tabitha?"

"I don't see how I could have done otherwise. And she really has a great deal of taste in her work. She saw in a minute what's been the trouble with my bonnets—you know I always told you there was something—they were not high enough in front. Don't you think yourself, now, that this is an improvement?"

Miss Wilcox lifted her chin, and turned her head

slowly around for inspection ; but, instead of the praise which was expected, there came a merry outburst of laughter.

"And you really bought a bonnet of her!" Kate laughed again at the thought, and then, with a sudden impulse, rose from her chair, glided swiftly to where Tabitha sat, and kissed her. "You soft-hearted, ridiculous, sweet old thing!" she said, beaming at her, and smoothing the old maid's cheek in affectionate patronage.

Tabitha smiled with pleasure at this rare caress, and preened her head and thin shoulders with a bird-like motion. But then the serious side of her experience loomed once more before her, and the smile vanished as swiftly as it had come.

"She's not living with her father, you know. She and one of her half-sisters have had the back rooms rigged up to live in, and there they are by themselves. I guess she saw by my face that I didn't think much of *that* part of the business. Still, thank goodness, it's only till the first of May!"

"Shall you turn them out then, Tabitha?" Kate spoke seriously now.

"The place has always been respectable, Kate, even if it is tumble-down. To be sure, I did hear certain stories about the family of the man who sold non-explosive oil there two years ago, and his wife frizzed her hair in a way that went against my grain, I must admit ; but it would never do to have a scandal about one of my houses, not even *that* one!"

"I know nothing about these people, of course,"

said Kate, slowly and thoughtfully ; “ but it seems to me, to speak candidly, Tabitha, that you are the only one who is making what you call a scandal. No—wait ; let me finish. In some curious way the thought of this girl has kept itself in my head—perhaps it was because she came back here on the same train with me, or something else equally trivial. Perhaps she is as bad a character as you seem to think, but it may also be that she only wants a little help to be a good girl and to make an honest living for herself. To me, her starting a shop like that here in her native village seems to show that she wants to work.”

“ Why, Kate, everybody knows her character. There’s no secret in the world about *that*.”

“ But suppose I am right about her present wish. Suppose that she does truly want to rehabilitate herself. Would you like to have it on your conscience that you put so much as a straw in her way, let alone turned her out of the little home she has made for herself? I know you better than that, Tabitha: you couldn’t bring yourself to do it. But there is this other thing. You may do her a great deal of injury by talking about her, as, for example, you have been talking to me here to-day. I am going to ask you a favor, a real personal favor. I want you to promise me not to mention that girl’s name again to a living soul until—when shall I say?—until the first of May ; and if anybody else mentions it, to say nothing at all. Now, will you promise that ? ”

"Of course, if you wish it, but I assure you there wasn't the slightest doubt in the world."

"That I don't care about. Why should we women be so brutal to each other? You and I had good homes, good fathers, and never knew what it was to want for anything, or to fight single-handed against the world. How can we tell what might have crushed and overwhelmed us if we had been really down in the thick of the battle, instead of watching it from a private box up here? No: give the girl a chance, and remember your promise."

"Come to think of it, she has been to church twice now, two Sundays running. And Mrs. Turner spoke to her in the vestibule, seeing that she was a stranger and neatly dressed, and didn't dream who she was; and she told me she was never so mortified in her life as when she found out afterward. A clergyman's wife has to be *so* particular, you know."

"Yes," Kate answered, absently. Her heart was full of bitter and sardonic things to say about Mrs. Turner and her conceptions of the duties of a pastor's helpmeet, but she withheld them because they might grieve Tabitha, and then was amazed at herself for being so considerate, and then fell to wondering whether she, too, was bitten by this pharisaical spirit, and so started as out of a dream when Tabitha rose and said she must go and see Mrs. Minster before she took her departure.

"Remember your promise," Kate said, with a little smile and another caress. She had not been so affectionate before in a long, long time, and the old

maid mused flightily on this unwonted softness as she found her way up-stairs.

The girl returned to the window and looked out once more upon the smooth white crust which, broken only by half-buried dwarf firs, stretched across the wide lawn. When at last she wearied of the prospect and her thoughts, and turned to join the family on the floor above, she confided these words aloud to the solitude of the big room :

“ I almost wish I could start a milliner’s shop myself.”

The depreciatory reflection that she had never discovered in all these years what was wrong with Tabitha’s bonnets rose with comical suddenness in her mind, and she laughed as she opened the door.

CHAPTER XIV.

HORACE EMBARKS UPON THE ADVENTURE.

YOUNG Mr. Boyce was spared the trouble of going to Florida, and relieved from the embarrassment of inventing lies to his partner about the trip, which was even more welcome. Only a few days after the interview with Mrs. Minster, news came of the unexpected death of Lawyer Clarke, caused by one of those sudden changes of temperature at sunset which have filled so many churchyards in that sunny clime. His executors were both resident in Thessaly, and at a word from Mrs. Minster they turned over to Horace the box containing the documents relating to her affairs. Only one of these executors, old 'Squire Gedney, expressed any comment upon Mrs. Minster's selection, at least in Horace's hearing.

This Gedney was a slovenly and mumbling old man, the leading characteristics of whose appearance were an unshaven jaw, a general shininess and disorder of apparel, and a great deal of tobacco-juice. It was still remembered that in his youth he had promised to be an important figure at the bar and in politics. His failure had been exceptionally obvious and complete, but for some occult reason Thessaly had a soft corner in its heart for him, even when his estate bordered upon the disreputable, and for many

years had been in the habit of electing him to be one of its justices of the peace. The functions of this office he avowedly employed in the manner best calculated to insure the livelihood which his fellow-citizens expected him to get out of it. His principal judicial maxim was never to find a verdict against the party to a suit who was least liable to pay him his costs. If justice could be made to fit with this rule, so much the better for justice. But, in any event, the 'squire must look out primarily for his costs. He made no concealment of this theory and practice; and while some citizens who took matters seriously were indignant about it, the great majority merely laughed and said the old man had got to live somehow, and voted good-naturedly for him next time.

If Calvin Gedney owed much to the amiability and friendly feeling of his fellow-townsmen, he repaid the debt but poorly in kind. No bitterer or more caustic tongue than his wagged in all Dearborn County. When he was in a companionable mood, and stood around in the cigar store and talked for the delectation of the boys of an evening, the range and scope of his personal sneers and sarcasms would expand under the influence of applauding laughter, until no name, be it never so honored, was sacred from his attack, save always one—that of Minster. There was a popular understanding that Stephen Minster had once befriended Gedney, and that that accounted for the exception; but this was rendered difficult of credence by the fact that so many other

men had befriended Gedney, and yet now served as targets for his most rancorous jeers. Whatever the reason may have been, however, the 'squire's affection for the memory of Stephen Minster, and his almost defiant reverence for the family he had left behind, were known to all men, and regarded as creditable to him.

Perhaps this was in some way accountable for the fact that the 'squire remained year after year in old Mr. Clarke's will as an executor, long after he had ceased to be regarded as a responsible person by the village at large, for Mr. Clarke also was devoted to the Minsters. At all events, he was so named in the will, in conjunction with a non-legal brother of the deceased, and it was in this capacity that he addressed some remarks to Mr. Horace Boyce when he handed over to him the Minster papers. The scene was a small and extremely dirty chamber off the justice's court-room, furnished mainly by a squalid sofa-bed, a number of empty bottles on the bare floor, and a thick overhanging canopy of cobwebs.

"Here they are," said the 'squire, expectorating indefinitely among the bottles, "and God help 'em! What it all means beats me."

"I guess you needn't worry, Cal," answered Horace lightly, in the easily familiar tone which Thessaly always adopted toward its unrespected magistrate. "You'd better come out and have a drink; then you'll see things brighter."

"Damn your impudence, you young cub!" shouted the 'squire, flaming up into sudden and inexpli-

cable wrath. "Who are you calling 'Cal'? By the Eternal, when I was your age, I'd have as soon bitten off my tongue as dared call a man of my years by his Christian name! I can remember your great-grandfather, the judge, sir. I was admitted before he died; and I tell you, sir, that if it had been possible for me to venture upon such a piece of cheek with him, he'd have taken me over his knee, by Gawd! and walloped me before the whole assembled bar of Dearborn County!"

The old man had worked himself up into a feverish reminiscence of his early stump-speaking days, and he trembled and spluttered over his concluding words with unwonted excitement.

Horace felt disposed to laugh. People always did laugh at "Cal" Gedney, and laugh most when he grew strenuous.

"You'd better get the drink first," he said, putting the box under his arm, "and *then* free your mind."

"I'll see you food for worms, first!" shouted the 'squire, still furiously. "You've got your papers, and I've got my opinion, and that's all there is 'twixt you and me. There's the door that the carpenters made, and I guess they were thinking of you when they made it."

"Upon my word, you're amusing this morning, 'squire," said Horace, looking with aroused interest at the vehement justice. "What's the matter with you? Don't your clothes fit you? Come around to the house and I'll rig you up in some new ones."

The 'squire began with a torrent of explosive pro-

fanity, framed in gestures which almost threatened personal violence. All at once he stopped short, looked vacantly at the floor, and then sat down on his bed, burying his face in his hands. From the convulsive clenching of his fingers among the grizzled, unkempt locks of hair, and the heaving of his chest, Horace feared he was going to have a fit, and, advancing, put a hand on his shoulder.

The 'squire shook it off roughly, and raised his haggard, deeply-furrowed face. It was a strong-featured countenance still, and had once been handsome as well, but what it chiefly said to Horace now was that the old man couldn't stand many more such nights of it as this last had evidently been.

"Come, 'squire, I didn't want to annoy you. I'm sorry if I did."

"You insulted me," said the old man, with a dignity which quavered into pathos as he added: "I've got so low now, by Gawd, that even you can insult me!"

Horace smiled at the impracticability of all this. "What the deuce is it all about, anyway?" he asked. "What have you got against me? I've always been civil to you, haven't I?"

"You're no good," was the justice's concise explanation.

The young man laughed outright. "I daresay you're right," he said, pleasantly, as one humors a child. "*Now* will you come out and have a drink?"

"I've not been forty-four years at the bar for nothing—"

"I should think not! Whole generations of bar-keepers can testify to that."

"I can tell," went on the old man, ignoring the jest, and rising from the bed as he spoke; "I can tell when a man's got an honest face. I can tell when he means to play fair. And I wouldn't trust you one inch farther, Mr. Horace Boyce, than I could throw a bull by the tail. I tell you that, sir, straight to your teeth."

Horace, still with the box snugly under his arm, had sauntered out into the dark and silent courtroom. He turned now, half smiling, and said:

"Third and last call—*do* you want a drink?"

The old man's answer was to slam the door in his face with a noise which rang in reverberating echoes through the desolate hall of justice. Horace, still smiling, went away.

The morning had lapsed into afternoon, and succeeding hours had brought the first ashen tints of dusk into the winter sky, before the young man completed his examination of the Minster papers. He had taken them to his own room in his father's house, sending word to the office that he had a cold and would not come down that day; and it was behind a locked door that he had studied the documents which stood for millions. On a sheet of paper he made certain memoranda from time to time, and now that the search was ended, he lighted a fresh cigar, and neatly reduced these to a little tabular statement:

MRS. MINSTER.		KATE MINSTER.		ETHEL MINSTER.	
A.	\$650,000 @ 3½%.....\$22,750	\$300,000 @ 3½%.....\$10,500	\$250,000 @ 3½%.....	\$8,750	
B.	300,000 @ 4%.....12,000	200,000 @ 4%.....8,000	100,000 @ 4%.....	4,000	
C.	25,000 @ 5%.....1,250	200,000 @ 5%.....10,000	75,000 @ 5%.....	3,750	
D.	100,000 no div.....	50,000 no div.....	25,000 no div.....		
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	\$1,075,000 •	\$750,000	\$450,000	\$16,500	
	—capital	—capital	—capital	—income.	
		—income.			

Totals.....A = Property known as Minster iron-works, with ore fields.....	\$1,200,000
B = Three blocks of shares in Northern Union Tel. Co.....	600,000
C = Various railroad, town, water, and other properties.....	300,000
D = 175 shares in Thessaly Mfg. Co.....	175,000
Grand totals.....	Capital of family = \$2,275,000
	Income of family = 81,000

When Horace had finished this he felt justified in helping himself to some brandy and soda. It was the most interesting and important computation upon which he had ever engaged, and its noble proportions grew upon him momentarily as he pondered them and sipped his drink. More than two and a quarter millions lay before his eyes, within reach of his hand. Was it not almost as if they were his? And of course this did not represent everything. There was sundry village property that he knew about ; there would be bank accounts, minor investments and so on, quite probably raising the total to nearly or quite two millions and a half. Oh, to think of it !

And he had only put things down at par values. The telegraph stock was quoted at a trifle less, just now, but if there had been any Minster Iron-works stock for sale, it would command a heavy premium. The scattering investments, too, which yielded an average of five per cent., must be worth a good deal more than their face. What he didn't like about the thing was that big block of Thessaly Manufacturing Company stock. That seemed to be earning nothing at all ; he could find no record of dividends, or, in truth, any information whatever about it. Where had he heard about that company before? The name was curiously familiar to his mind ; he had been told something about it—by whom ?

All at once it flashed upon him. That was the company of which the mysterious Judge Wendover was president. Tenney had talked about it ; Ten-

ney had told him that he would hear a good deal about it before long.

As these reflections rose in the young man's mind, the figures which he had written down on the paper seemed to diminish in size and significance. It was a queer notion, but he couldn't help feeling that the millions had somehow moved themselves farther back, out of his reach. The thought of these two men—of the gray-eyed, thin-lipped, abnormally smart Tenney, and of that shadowy New York financier who shared his secrets—made him nervous. They had a purpose, and he was more or less linked to it and to them, and Heaven only knew where he might be dragged in the dark. He finished his glass and resolved that he would no longer remain in the dark. To-morrow he would see Tenney and Mrs. Minster and Reuben, and have a clear understanding all around.

There came sharp and loud upon his door a peremptory knocking, and Horace with a swift movement slipped the paper on which he had made the figures into the box, and noiselessly closed the cover. Then he opened the door, and discovered before him a man whom for the instant, in the dim light of the hall, he did not recognize. The man advanced a step, and then Horace saw that it was—strangely changed and unlike himself—his father!

"I didn't hear you come in," said the young man, vaguely confused by the altered appearance of the General, and trying in some agitation of mind to define the change and to guess what it portended.

"They told me you were here," said the father, moving lumpishly forward into the room, and sinking into a chair. "I'm glad of it. I want to talk to you."

His voice had suddenly grown muffled, as if with age or utter weariness. His hands lay palm upward and inert on his fat knees, and he buried his chin in his collar helplessly. The gaze which he fastened opaquely upon the waste-paper basket, and the posture of his relaxed body, suggested to Horace a simple explanation. Evidently this was the way his delightful progenitor looked when he was drunk. It was not a nice sight.

"Wouldn't it be better to go to bed now, and talk afterward?" said the young man, with asperity.

The General looked up at his son. He clearly understood the purport of the question, and gathered his brows at first in a half-scowl. Then the humor of the position appealed to him, and he smiled instead—a grim and terrifying smile which seemed to darken rather than illumine his purplish face.

"Did you think I was drunk, that you should say that?" he asked, with the ominous smile still on his lips. He added, more slowly, and with something of his old dignity: "No—I'm merely ruined!"

"It has come, has it?" The young man heard himself saying these words, but they sounded as if they had issued from other lips than his. He had schooled himself for a fortnight to realize that his father was actually insolvent, yet the shock seemed to find him all unprepared.

"Then you expected it? You knew about it?"

"Tenney told me last month that it must come, sooner or later."

The General offered an invocation as to Mr. Tenney's present existence and future state which, solemnly impressive though it was, may not be set down here.

"So I say, too, if you like," answered Horace, beginning to pace the room. "But that will hardly help us just now. Tell me just what has happened."

"Sit down, then: you make me nervous, tramping about like that. The villain simply asked me to step into the office for a minute, and then took out his note-book, cool as a cucumber. 'I thought I'd call your attention to how things stand between us,' he said, as if I'd been a country customer who was behindhand with his paper. Then the scoundrel calmly went on to say that my interest in the partnership was worth less than nothing; that I already owed him more than the interest would come to, if the business were sold out, and that he would like to know what I proposed to do about it. By Heaven! that's what he said to me, and I sat there and listened to him."

"What did you say?"

"I told him what I thought of him. He hasn't heard so much straight, solid truth about himself before since he was weaned, I'll bet!"

"But what good was that? He isn't the sort who minds that kind of thing. What did you tell him you would do?"

"Break his infernal skull for him if he ever spoke to me again!"

Horace almost smiled, as he felt how much older he was than this red-faced, white-haired boy, who could fight and drink and tell funny stories, world without end, but was powerless to understand business even to the extent of protecting his interest in a hardware store. But the tendency to smile was painfully short-lived; the subject was too serious.

"Well, tell *me*, then, what you are going to do!"

"Good God!" broke forth the General, raising his head again. "What *can* I do! Crawl into a hole and die somewhere, I should think. I don't see anything else. But before I do, mark me, I'll have a few minutes alone with that scoundrel, in his office, in the street, wherever I can find him; and if I don't fix him up so that his own mother won't know him, then my name isn't 'Vane' Boyce!"

"Tut-tut," said the prudent lawyer of the family. "Men don't die because they fail in the hardware business, and this isn't Kentucky. We don't thrash our enemies up here in the North. Do you want me to see Tenney?"

"I suppose so—if you can stomach a talk with the whelp. He said something, too, about talking it over with you, but I was too raving mad to listen. Have you had any dealings with him?"

"Nothing definite. We've discussed one or two little things—in the air—that is all."

The General rose and helped himself to some neat brandy from his son's *liqueur*-stand. "Well, if you

do—you hear me—he'll singe you clean as a whistle. By God, he won't leave so much as a pin-feather on you!"

Horace smiled incredulously. "I rather think I can take care of Mr. Schuyler Tenney," said he, with a confident front. "I'll go down and see him now, if you like, and don't you worry yourself about it. I daresay I can straighten it out all right. The best thing you can do is to say nothing at all about your affairs to anybody. It might complicate matters if he heard that you had been publicly proclaiming your intention of beating him into a jelly. I don't know, but I can fancy that he might not altogether like that. And, above all things, don't get down on your luck. I guess we can keep our heads above water, Tenney or no Tenney."

The young man felt that it was distinctly decent of him to thus assume responsibility for the family, and did not look to see the General take it so much as a matter of course. But that distinguished soldier had quite regained his spirits, and smacked his lips over a second glass of brandy with smiling satisfaction, as if Tenney had already been turned out of the hardware store, neck and crop.

"All right! You go ahead, and let him have it from the shoulder. Give him one for me, while you're about it," he said, with his old robust voice and hearty manner all come back again. The elasticity of this stout man's temperament was a source of perpetual wonderment to his slender son.

Yet Horace, too, had much the same singular

capacity for shaking off trouble, and he saw matters in quite a hopeful light as he strode along down toward Main Street. Clearly Tenney had only meant to frighten the General.

He found his father's partner in the little office boxed off the store, and had a long talk with him—a talk prolonged, in fact, until after business hours. When he reflected upon this conversation during his homeward journey, he could recall most distinctly that he had told Tenney everything about the Minsters which the search of the papers revealed. Somehow, the rest of the talk had not seemed to be very important. Tenney had laughed lightly when the question of the General came up, and said: "Oh, you needn't bother about that. I only wanted him to know how things stood. He can go on as long as he likes; that is, of course, if you and I continue to work together." And Horace had said that he was much obliged, and would be glad to work with Mr. Tenney—and really that had been the sum of the whole conversation.

Or yes, there had been one other thing. Tenney had said that it would be best now to tell Reuben Tracy that Mrs. Minster had turned over her affairs to him—temporarily, at least—but not to discuss them with him at all, and not to act as if he thought they were of special importance.

Horace felt that this could easily be done. Reuben was the least suspicious man in the world, and the matter might be so stated to him that he would never give it a second thought.

The General received over the supper-table the tidings that no evil was intended to him, much as his son had expected him to; that is, with perfectly restored equanimity. He even admitted that Tenney was within his rights to speak as he did, and that there should be no friction provoked by any word or act of his.

"I don't like the man, you know," he said, between mouthfuls, "but it's just as well that I should stick by him. He's skinned me dry, and my only chance is now to keep friendly with him, in the hope that when he begins skinning other people he'll let me make myself good out of the proceeds."

This worldly wisdom, emanating from such an unlikely source, surprised the young man, and he looked up with interest to his father's face, red-shining under the lamplight.

"I mean what I say," continued the General, who ate with unfailing gusto as he talked. "Tenney as much as said that to me himself, awhile ago."

Horace nodded with comprehension. He had thought the aphorism too concise and strong for his father's invention.

"And I could guess with my eyes shut how he's going to do it," the elder Boyce went on. "He's got a lot of the stock of the Thessaly Manufacturing Company, the one that's built the rolling mills in connection with the Minster iron-works, and the rest of the stock is held in New York; and some fine day the New Yorkers will wake up and find themselves cleaned out. Oh, I know Mr. Tenney's little ways!"

The General wagged his round head upon its thick neck with complacency at his superior insight, but Horace finished his supper in silence. He did not see very far into the millstone yet, but already he guessed that the stockholders who were to be despoiled lived in Thessaly and not New York. A strange, amorphous vision of the looting of the millions arose like a mirage between him and the shaded lamplight, and he looked into its convolving vortex half in terror, half in trembling fascination.

Suddenly he felt himself impelled to say—why he could not tell—"I might as well speak to you about it. It is my ambition to marry Miss Kate Minster. I think I shall succeed."

The General almost upset his chair in his eagerness to rise, lean over the table, and shake hands with his son.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAWTON GIRL'S WORK.

FORTUNATELY Jessica Lawton's humble little business enterprise began to bring in returns before her slender store of money was quite exhausted. Even more fortunate, at least in her estimation, was the fact that the lion's share of this welcome patronage came from the poor working-girls of the village. When the venture was a month old, there was nearly enough work to occupy all her time, and, taking into account the season, this warranted her in believing that she had succeeded.

The result had not come without many anxious days, made bitter alike by despairing tremors for the future and burning indignation at the insults and injuries of the present. Now that these had in a measure abated, she felt, in looking back upon them, that the fear of failure was always the least of her troubles. At the worst, the stock which, through Mrs. Fairchild's practical kindness, she had been able to bring from Tecumseh, could be sold for something like its cost. Her father's help had sufficed for nearly all the changes needed in the small tenement, and she had money enough to pay the rent until May.

The taking over of Lucinda was a more serious matter, for the girl had been a wage-earner, and would be entitled to complain if it turned out that she had been decoyed away from the factory on an empty promise. But Lucinda, so far from complaining, seemed exceptionally contented. It was true that she gave no promise of ever acquiring skill as a milliner, and she was not infrequently restless under the discipline which Jessica, with perhaps exaggerated caution, strove to impose, but she worked with great diligence in their tiny kitchen, and served customers in the store with enthusiasm if not *finesse*. The task of drilling her into that habit of mind which considers finger-nails and is mindful of soap was distinctly onerous, and even now had reached only a stage in which progress might be reported; but much could be forgiven a girl who was so cheerful and who really tried so hard to do her share.

As for the disagreeable experiences, which had once or twice been literally terrifying, the girl still grew sick at heart with rage and shame and fear that they might jeopardize her plans, when she thought of them. In their ruder aspects they were divisible into two classes. A number of young men, sometimes in groups of twos or threes, but more often furtively and alone, had offensively sought to make themselves at home in the store, and had even pounded on the door in the evening after it was shut and bolted; a somewhat larger number of rough factory-girls, or idlers of the factory-girl class, had come from time to time with the obvious inten-

tion of insulting her. These latter always appeared in gangs, and supported one another in cruel giggling and in coarse inquiries and remarks.

After a few painfully futile attempts to meet and rebuff these hostile waves, Jessica gave up the effort, and arranged matters so that she could work in the living-room beyond, within call if she were needed, but out of the visual range of her persecutors. Lucinda encountered them instead, and gave homely but vigorous Rolands for their Olivers. It was in the interchange of these remarks that the chief danger to the struggling little business lay, for if genuine customers heard them, why, there was an end to everything. It is not easy to portray the girl's relief as week after week went by, and time brought not only no open scandal, but a marked diminution of annoyance. When Jessica was no longer visible, interest in the sport lagged. To come merely for the sake of baiting Lucinda was not worth the while. And when these unfriendly visits slackened, and then fell off almost altogether, Jessica hugged to her breast the notion that it was because these rough young people had softened toward and begun to understand and sympathize with her.

It was the easier to credit this kindly hypothesis in that she had already won the suffrages of a considerable circle of working-girls. To explain how this came about would be to analyze many curious and apparently contradictory phases of untutored human nature, and to recount many harmless little stratagems and well-meant devices, and many other

frankly generous words and actions which came from hearts not the less warm because they beat amid the busy whirl of the looms, or throbbed to the time of the seamstress's needle.

Jessica's own heart was uplifted with exultation, sometimes, when she thought upon the friendliness of these girls. So far as she knew and believed, every one of them was informed as to her past, and there was no reason beyond their own inclination why they should take stock in her intentions for the future. To a slender few, originally suggested by Lucinda, and then confirmed by her own careful scrutiny, she had confided the crude outlines of her scheme—that is, to build up a following among the toilers of her own sex, to ask from this following no more than a decent living for work done, and to make this work include not merely the details of millinery and hints about dress, but a general mental and material helpfulness, to take practical form step by step as the means came to hand and the girls themselves were ready for the development. Whenever she had tried to put this into words, its melancholy vagueness had been freshly apparent to her, but the girls had believed in her! That was the great thing.

And they had brought others, and spread the favorable report about, until even now, in the dead season, lying half way between Christmas and the beginning of Lent, she was kept quite busy. To be sure, her patrons were not governed much by these holiday dates at any time, and she was undoubtedly

doing their work better and more cheaply than it could ever have been done for them before, but their good spirit in bringing it was none the less evident for that.

And out of the contact with this good spirit, Jessica began to be dimly conscious of getting great stores of strength for herself. If it could be all like this, she felt that her life would be ideally happy. She had not the skill of mind to separate her feelings, and contrast and weigh them one against the other, but she knew clearly enough that she was doing what afforded her keen enjoyment, and it began to be apparent that merely by doing it she would come to see more clearly, day by day, how to expand and ennoble her work. The mission which Annie Fairchild had urged upon her and labored to fit her for, and which she had embraced and embarked upon with only the vaguest ideas as to means or details or specific aims, was unfolding itself inspiringly before her.

During this period she wrote daily to the good woman who had sent her upon this work—short letters setting forth tersely the events and outcome of the day—and the answers which came twice a week helped greatly to strengthen her.

And do not doubt that often she stood in grave need of strength! The mere matter of regular employment itself was still more or less of a novelty to her; regular hours still found her physically rebellious. The restraints of a shop, of studied demeanor, of frugal meals, of no intimate society save that of

one dull girl,—these still wore gratingly upon her nerves, and produced periodical spasms of depression and gloom, in which she was much tortured by doubts about herself and the utility of what she was doing.

Sometimes, too, these doubts took the positive form of temptation—of a wild kind of longing to get back again into the atmosphere where bright lights shone on beautiful dresses, and the hours went swiftly, gayly by with jest, and song, and the sparkle of the amber air-beads rising in the tall wine-glasses. There came always afterward the memory of those other hours which dragged most gruesomely, when the daylight made all tawdry and hateful once more, and heartaches ruled where smiles had been. Yet still these unbidden yearnings would come, and then the girl would set her teeth tight together, and thrust her needle through the mutinous tears till they were exorcised.

It had been in her unshaped original plan to do a good deal for her father, but this proved to be more easily contemplated than done. Once the little rooms had been made habitable for her and Lucinda, there remained next to nothing for him to do. He came around every morning, when some extraordinary event, such as a job of work or a fire, did not interfere, and offered his services, but he knew as well as they did that this was a mere amiable formality. He developed a great fondness for sitting by the stove in Jessica's small working room, and either watching her industrious fingers or sleep-

ing calmly in his chair. Perhaps the filial instinct was not strong in Lucinda's composition ; perhaps it had been satiated by over-close contact during those five years of Jessica's absence. At any rate, the younger girl did not enjoy Ben's presence as much as her sister seemed to, and almost daily detracted from his comfort by suggestions that the apartments were very small, and that a man hanging around all day took up a deplorable amount of room.

It had been Jessica's notion, too, that she and her sister would walk out in the evenings under the escort of their father, and thus secure themselves from misapprehension. But Lucinda rebelled flatly against this, at least until Ben had some new clothes, and the money for these was not forthcoming. Jessica did find it possible to spare a dollar or so to her father weekly, and there had been a nebulous understanding that this was to be applied to raiment ; but the only change in his appearance effected by this so far had been a sporadic accession of startlingly white paper collars.

There were other minor disappointments—portions of her plan, so to speak, which had failed to materialize—but the net result of a month's trial was distinctly hopeful. Although most of such work as had come to her was from the factory-girls, not a few ladies had visited the little store, and made purchases or given orders. Among these she liked best of all the one who owned the house ; a very friendly old person, with corkscrew curls and an

endless tongue—Miss Tabitha Wilcox. She had already made two bonnets for her, and the elderly lady had been so pleasant and talkative that she had half resolved, when next she came in, to unfold to her the scheme which now lay nearest to her heart.

This was nothing less than securing permission to use a long-deserted and roomy building which stood in the yard, at the back of the one she occupied, as a sort of evening club for the working-girls of the town. Jessica had never been in this building, but so far as she could see through the stained and dismantled windows, where the drifts did not render approach impossible, it had formerly been a dwelling-house, and later had been used in part as a carpenter's shop.

To get this, and to fit it up simply but comfortably as a place where the tired factory and sewing girls could come in the evening, to read or talk or play games if they liked, to merely sit still and rest if they chose, but in either case to be warm and contented and sheltered from the streets and the deadly boredom of squalid lodgings, became little by little her abiding ambition. She had spoken tentatively to some of the girls about it, and they were all profoundly enthusiastic over the plan.

It remained to enlist the more fortunate women whose assistance could alone make the plan feasible. Jessica had essayed to get at the parson's wife, Mrs. Turner; but that lady, after having been extremely cordial, had unaccountably all at once turned icy cold, and cut the girl dead in the street. I said

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"unaccountably," but Jessica was not at all at a loss to comprehend the change, and the bitterness of the revelation had thrown her into an unusually deep fit of depression. For a time it had seemed to her hopeless to try to find another confidante in that class which despised and shrank from her. Then Miss Tabitha's pleasant words and transparent good-heartedness had lifted her out of her despondency, and she was almost resolved now to approach her on the subject of the house in the back yard.

CHAPTER XVI.

A GRACIOUS FRIEND RAISED UP.

THE opportunity which Jessica sought came with unlooked-for promptness—in fact, before she had quite resolved what to ask for, and how best to prefer her request.

It was a warm, sunny winter morning, with an atmosphere which suggested the languor of May rather than the eagerness of early spring, and which was already in these few matutinal hours playing havoc with the snowbanks. The effects of the thaw were unpleasantly visible on the sidewalks, where deep puddles were forming as the drifts melted away, and the back yard was one large expanse of treacherous slush. Jessica had hoped that her father would come, in order that he might cut away the ice and snow in front, and thus drain the walk for passers-by. But as the mild morning air rendered it unnecessary to seek the comfort of a seat by the stove, Ben preferred to lounge about on the outskirts of the hay-market, exchanging indolent jokes with kindred idlers, and vaguely enjoying the sunshine.

Samantha, however, chose this forenoon for her first visit to the milliner's shop, and showed a disposition to make herself very much at home. The

fact that encouragement was plainly wanting did not in any way abash her. Lucinda told her flatly that she had only come to see what she could pick up, and charged her to her face with having instigated her friends to offer them annoyance and affront. Samantha denied both imputations with fervor, the while she tried on before the mirror a bronze-velvet toque with sage-green feathers.

"I don't know that I ever quite believed that of you, Samantha," said Jessica, turning from her dismayed contemplation of the water on the sidewalk. "And if you really want to be friendly, why, you are welcome to come here. But I have heard of things you have said that were not at all nice."

"All lies!" remarked Samantha, studying the effect of the hat as nearly in a profile view as she could manage with a single glass. "You can't believe a word you hear here in Thessaly. Wouldn't this go better if there was some yellow put in there, close by the feathers?"

"I didn't want to believe it," said Jessica. "I've never done you any harm, and never wished anything but well by you, and I couldn't see why you should want to injure me."

"Don't I tell you they lied?" responded Samantha, affably. "'Cindy, here, is always blackguarding me. You know you always did," she added, in passing comment upon Lucinda's indignant snort, "but I don't bear no malice. It ain't my nature to. I suppose a hat like this comes pretty high, don't it?"

As she spoke, a sleigh was driven up with some difficulty through the yielding snowbanks, and stopped close to the sidewalk in front of the shop. It was by far the most distinguished-looking sleigh Jessica had seen in Thessaly. The driver on the front seat bore a cockade proudly in his high hat, and the horses he controlled were superbly matched creatures, with glossy silver-mounted harness, and with tails neatly braided and tied up in ribbons for protection from the slush. A costly silver-fox wrap depended over the back of the cutter, and a robe of some darker but equally sumptuous fur enfolded the two ladies who sat in the second seat.

Jessica was glad that so splendid an equipage should have drawn up at her door, with a new-born commercial instinct, even before she recognized either occupant of the sleigh.

"That's Kate Minster," said Samantha, still with the hat of her dreams on her head, "the handsomest girl in Thessaly, and the richest, and the stuck-up-est. Cracky! but you're in luck!"

Jessica did not know much about the Minsters, but she now saw that the other lady, who was already preparing to descend, and stood poised on the rail of the cutter looking timorously at the water on the walk, was no other than Miss Tabitha Wilcox.

She turned with quick decision to Samantha.

"I will give you that hat you've got on," she said in a hurried tone, "if you'll go with Lucinda clear back into the kitchen and shut both doors tight after you, and stay there till I call you."

At this considerable sacrifice the store was cleared for the reception of these visitors—the most important who had as yet crossed its threshold.

Miss Tabitha did not offer to introduce her companion—whom Jessica noted furtively as a tall, stately, dark girl, with a wonderfully handsome face, who stood silently by the little showcase and was wrapped in furs worth the whole stock of millinery she confronted—but bustled about the store, while she plunged into the middle of an explanation about hats she had had, hats she thought of having, and hats she might have had, of which the milliner understood not a word. It was not, indeed, essential that she should, for presently Tabitha stopped short, looked about her triumphantly, and asked :

“Now, wasn’t I right? Aren’t they the nicest in town?”

The tall girl smiled, and inclined her dignified head.

“They are very pretty, indeed,” she answered, and Jessica remarked to herself what a soft, rich voice it was, that made even those commonplace words so delightful to the ear.

“I don’t know that we wanted to look at anything in particular,” rattled on Miss Tabitha. “We were driving by” (O Tabitha! as if Miss Kate had not commanded this excursion for no other purpose than this visit!) “and I just thought we’d drop in, for I’ve been telling Miss Minster about what excellent taste you had.”

A momentary pause ensued, and then Jessica,

conscious of blushes and confusion, made bold to unburden her mind of its plan.

"I wanted to speak to you," she said, falteringly at first, but with a resolution to have it all out, "about that vacant house in the back yard here. It looks as if it had been a carpenter's shop last, and it seems in very bad repair."

"I suppose it might as well come down," broke in Miss Wilcox. "Still, I—"

"Oh, no! that wasn't what I meant!" protested Jessica. "I—I wanted to propose something about it to you. If—if you will be seated, I can explain what I meant."

The two ladies took chairs, but with a palpable accession of reserve on their countenances. The girl went on to explain:

"To begin with, the factory-girls and sewing-girls here spend too much time on the streets—I suppose it is so everywhere—the girls who were thrown out when the match factory shut down, particularly. What else can they do? There is no other place. Then they get into trouble, or at any rate they learn slangy talk and coarse ways. But you can't blame them, for their homes, when they have any, are not pleasant places, and where they hire rooms it is almost worse still. Now, I've been thinking of something—or, rather, it isn't my own idea, but I'll speak about that later on. This is the idea: I have come to know a good many of the best of these girls—perhaps you would think they were the worst, too, but they're not—and I know they

would be glad of some good place where they could spend their evenings, especially in the winter, where it would be cosy and warm, and they could read or talk, or bring their own sewing for themselves, and amuse themselves as they liked. And I had thought that perhaps that old house could be fixed up so as to serve, and they could come through the shop here after tea, and so I could keep track of them, don't you see?"

"I don't quite think I do," said Miss Tabitha, with distinct disapprobation. The other lady said nothing.

Jessica felt her heart sink. The plan had seemed so excellent to her, and yet it was to be frowned down.

"Perhaps I haven't made it clear to you," she ventured to say.

"Oh, yes, you have," replied Miss Tabitha. "I don't mind pulling the house down, but to make it a rendezvous for all the tag-rag and bob-tail in town—I simply couldn't think of it! These houses along here have seen their best days, perhaps, but they've all been respectable, always!"

"I don't think myself that you have quite grasped Miss Lawton's meaning."

It was the low, full, quiet voice of the beautiful fur-clad lady that spoke, and Jessica looked at her with tears of anxious gratitude in her eyes.

Miss Minster seemed to avoid returning the glance, but went on in the same even, musical tone:

"It appears to me that there might be a great

deal of much-needed good done in just that way, Tabitha. The young lady says—I think I understood her to say—that she had talked with some of these girls, and that that is what they would like. It seems to me only common-sense, if you want to help people, to help them in their own way, and not insist, instead, that it shall be in your way—which really is no help at all!”

“Nobody can say, I hope, that I have ever declined to extend a helping hand to anybody who showed a proper spirit,” said Miss Wilcox, with dignity, putting up her chin.

“I know that, ma’am,” pleaded Jessica. “That is why I felt sure you would like my plan. I ought to tell you—it isn’t quite my plan. It was Mrs. Fairchild, at Tecumseh, who used to teach the Burfield school, who suggested it. She is a very, very good woman.”

“And I think it is a very, very good idea,” said Miss Kate, speaking for the first time directly to Jessica. “Of course, there would have to be safeguards.”

“You have no conception what a rough lot they are,” said Miss Tabitha, in more subdued protest. “There is no telling who they would bring here, or what they wouldn’t do.”

“Indeed, I am sure all that could be taken care of,” urged Jessica, taking fresh courage, and speaking now to both her visitors. “Only those whom I knew to mean well by the undertaking should be made members, and they would agree to very strict rules, I feel certain.”

"Why, child alive! where would you get the money for it, even if it could be done otherwise?" Miss Tabitha wagged her curls conclusively, but her smile was not unkind.

It would not be exact to say that Jessica had not considered this, but, as it was now presented, it seemed like a new proposition. She was not ready to answer it.

Miss Wilcox did not wait over long for a reply, but proceeded to point out, in a large and exhaustive way, the financial impossibilities of the plan. Jessica had neither heart nor words for an interruption, and Miss Kate listened in an absent-minded manner, her eyes on the plumes and velvets in the showcase.

The interruption did come in a curiously unexpected fashion. A loud stamping of wet feet was heard on the step outside; then the door from the street was opened. The vehemence of the call-bell's clamor seemed to dismay the visitor, or perhaps it was the presence of the ladies. At all events, he took off his hat, as if it had been a parlor instead of a shop, and made an awkward inclusive bow, reaching one hand back for the latch, as if minded to beat a retreat.

"Why, Mr. Tracy!" exclaimed Tabitha, rising from her chair.

Reuben advanced now and shook hands with both her and Jessica. For an instant the silence threatened to be embarrassing, and it was not wholly relieved when Tabitha presented him to Miss Minster,

and that young lady bowed formally without moving in her chair. But the lawyer could not suspect the disagreeable thoughts which were chasing one another behind these two unruffled and ladylike fronts, and it was evident enough that his coming was welcome to the mistress of the little shop.

"I have wanted to look in upon you before," he said to Jessica, "and I am ashamed to think that I haven't done so. I have been very much occupied with other matters. It doesn't excuse me to myself, but it may to you."

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Tracy," Jessica answered, and then realized how miserably inadequate the words were. "It's very kind of you to come at all," she added.

Tabitha shot a swift glance at her companion, and the two ladies rose, as by some automatic mechanical device, absolutely together.

"We must be going, Miss Lawton," said the old maid, primly.

A woman's intuition told Jessica that something had gone wrong. If she did not entirely guess the nature of the trouble, it became clear enough on the instant to her that these ladies misinterpreted Reuben's visit. Perhaps they did not like him—or perhaps— She stepped toward them and spoke eagerly, before she had followed out this second hypothesis in her mind.

"If you have a moment's time to spare," she pleaded, "I *wish* you would let me explain to Mr. Tracy the plan I have talked over with you. He

was my school-teacher; he is my oldest friend—the only friend I had when I was—a—a girl, and I haven't seen him before since the day I arrived home here. I should *so* much like to have you hear his opinion. The lady I spoke of—Mrs. Fairchild—wrote to him about me. Perhaps he knows of the plan already from her.”

Reuben did not know of the plan, and the two ladies consented to take seats again while it should be explained to him. Tabitha assumed a distant and uneasy expression of countenance, and looked straight ahead of her out through the glass door until the necessity for relief by conversation swelled up within her to bursting point; for Kate had rather flippantly deserted her, and so far from listening with haughty reserve under protest, had actually joined in the talk, and taken up the thread of Jessica's stumbling explanation

The three young people seemed to get on extremely well together. Reuben fired up with enthusiasm at the first mention of the plan, and showed so plainly the sincerity of his liking for it that Miss Minster felt herself, too, all aglow with zeal. Thus taken up by friendly hands, the project grew apace, and took on form and shape like Aladdin's palace.

Tabitha listened with a swiftly mounting impatience of her speechless condition, and a great sickening of the task of watching the cockade of the coachman outside, which she had imposed upon herself, as the talk went on. She heard Reuben say

that he would gladly raise a subscription for the work; she heard Kate ask to be allowed to head the list with whatever sum he thought best, and then to close the list with whatever additional sum was needed to make good the total amount required; she heard Jessica, overcome with delight, stammer out thanks for this unlooked-for adoption and endowment of her poor little plan, and then she could stand it no longer.

"Have you quite settled what you will do with my house?" she asked, still keeping her face toward the door. "There are some other places along here belonging to me—that is, they always have up to now—but of course if you have plans about them, too, just tell me, and—"

"Don't be absurd, Tabitha," said Miss Minster, rising from her chair as she spoke. "Of course we took your assent for granted from the start. I believe, candidly, that you are more enthusiastic about it this moment than even we are."

Reuben thought that the old lady dissembled her enthusiasm skilfully, but at least she offered no dissent. A few words more were exchanged, the lawyer promising again his aid, and Miss Minster insisting that she herself wanted the task of drawing up, in all its details, the working plan for the new institution, and, on second thoughts, would prefer to pay for it all herself.

"I have been simply famishing for something to do all these years," she said, in smiling confidence, to Tracy, "and here it is at last. You can't guess how

happy I shall be in mapping out the whole thing—rules and amusements and the arrangements of the rooms and the furnishing, and—everything.”

Perhaps Jessica’s face expressed too plainly the thought that this bantling of hers, which had been so munificently adopted, bade fair to be taken away from her altogether, for Miss Minster added: “Of course, when the sketch is fairly well completed, I will show it to *you*, and we will advise together,” and Jessica smiled again.

When the two ladies were seated again in the sleigh, and the horses had pranced their way through the wet snow up to the beaten track once more, Miss Tabitha said:

“I never knew a girl to run on so in all my born days. Here you are, seeing these two people for the very first time half an hour ago, and you’ve tied yourself up to goodness only knows what. One would think you’d known them all your life, the way you said ditto to every random thing that popped into their heads. And a pretty penny they’ll make it cost you, too! And what will your mother say?”

Miss Minster smiled good-naturedly, and patted her companion’s gloved hand with her own. “Never you worry, Tabitha,” she said, softly. “Don’t talk, please, for a minute. I want to think.”

It was a very long minute. The young heiress spent it in gazing abstractedly at the buttons on the coachman’s back, and the rapt expression on her face seemed to tell more of a pleasant day-dream than of serious mental travail. Miss Wilcox was

accustomed to these moods which called for silence, and offered no protest.

At last Kate spoke, with a tone of affectionate command. "When we get to the house I will give you a book to read, and I want you to finish every word of it before you begin anything else. It is called 'All Sorts and Conditions of Men,' and it tells how a lovely girl with whole millions of pounds did good in England, and I was thinking of it all the while we sat there in the shop. Only the mortification of it is, that in the book the rich girl originated the idea herself, whereas I had to have it hammered into my head by—by others. But you must read the book, and hurry with it, because—or no: I will get another copy to read again myself. And I will buy other copies; one for *her* and one for *him*, and one—"

She lapsed suddenly into silence again. The disparity between the stupendous dream out of which the People's Palace for East London's mighty hive of millions has been evolved, and the humble project of a sitting-room or two for the factory-girls of a village, rose before her vision, and had the effect of making her momentarily ridiculous in her own eyes. The familiarity, too, with which she had labelled these two strangers, this lawyer and this milliner, in her own thoughts, as "him" and "her," jarred just a little upon her maidenly consciousness. Perhaps she had rushed to embrace their scheme with too much avidity. It was generally her fault to be over-impetuous. Had she been so in this case?

"Of course, what we can do here"—she began

with less eagerness of tone, thinking aloud rather than addressing Tabitha—"must at best be on a very small scale. You must not be frightened by the book, where everything is done with fairy prodigality, and the lowest figures dealt with are hundreds of thousands. I only want you to read it that you may catch the spirit of it, and so understand how I feel. And you needn't worry about my wasting money, or doing anything foolish, you dear, timid old soul!"

Miss Wilcox, in her revolving mental processes, had somehow veered around to an attitude of moderate sympathy with the project, the while she listened to these words. "I'm sure you won't, my dear," she replied, quite sweetly. "And I daresay there can really be a great deal of good done, only, of course, it will have to be gone at cautiously and by degrees. And we must let old Runkle do the papering and whitewashing; don't forget that. He's had ever so much sickness in his family all the winter, and work is so slack."

"Do you know, I like your Mr. Tracy!" was Kate's irrelevant reply. She made it musingly, as if the idea were new to her mind.

"You can see for yourself there couldn't have been anything at all in that spiteful Sarah Cheeseborough's talk about him and her," said Tabitha, who now felt herself to have been all along the champion of this injured couple. "How on earth a respectable woman can invent such slanders beats my comprehension."

Kate Minster laughed merrily aloud. "It's lucky you weren't made of pancake batter, Tabitha," she said with mock gravity ; " for, if you had been, you never could have stood this being stirred both ways. You would have turned heavy and been spoiled."

"Instead of which I live to spoil other people, eh?" purred the gratified old lady, shaking her curls with affectionate pride.

"If we weren't out in the street, I believe I should kiss you, Tabitha," said the girl. "You can't begin to imagine how delightfully you have behaved to-day!"

CHAPTER XVII.

TRACY HEARS STRANGE THINGS.

REUBEN'S first impulse, when he found himself alone in the little shop with his former pupil, was to say good-by and get out as soon as he could. To the best of his recollection, he had never before been in a store consecrated entirely to the fashions and finery of the opposite sex, and he was oppressed by a sense of being an intruder upon an exclusively feminine domain. The young girl, too, whom he had been thinking of all this while as an unfortunate child whom he must watch over and be good to, stood revealed before him as a self-controlled and sophisticated woman, only a few years younger than himself in actual age, and much wiser than himself in the matters of head-gear and textures and colors which belonged to this place. He could have talked freely to her in his law-office, with his familiar accessories of papers and books about him. A background of bonnets was disconcerting.

"How beautiful she is!" were Jessica's first words, and they pleasurably startled the lawyer from his embarrassed reverie.

"She is, indeed," he answered, and somehow found himself hoping that the conversation would

cling to this subject a good while. "I had never met her before, as you saw, but of course I have known her by sight a long time."

"I don't think I ever saw her before to-day," said Jessica. "How wonderful it seems that she should have come, and then that you came, too, and that you both should like the plan, and take it up so, and make a success of it right at the start."

Reuben smiled. "In your eagerness to keep up with the procession I fear you are getting ahead of the band," he said. "I wouldn't quite call it a success, at present. But, no doubt, it's a great thing to have her enlisted in it. I'm glad she likes you; her friendship will make all the difference in the world to you, here in Thessaly."

The girl did not immediately answer, and Tracy, looking at her as she walked across to the showcase, was surprised to catch the glister of tears on her eyelashes. He had no idea what to say, but waited in pained puzzlement for her to speak.

"'Friendship' is not quite the word," she said at last, looking up at him and smiling with mournful softness through her tears. "I shall be glad if she likes me—as you say, it will be a great thing if she helps me—but we shall hardly be 'friends,' you know. *She* would never call it that. Oh, no! oh, no!"

Her voice trembled audibly over these last words, and she began hurriedly to re-arrange some of the articles in the showcase, with the obvious design of masking her emotion.

"You can do yourself no greater harm than by exaggerating that kind of notion, my girl," said Reuben Tracy, in his old gravely kind voice. "You would put thoughts into her head that way which she had never dreamt of otherwise; that is, if she weren't a good and sensible person. Why, she is a woman like yourself—"

"Oh, no, no! *Not like me!*"

Tracy was infinitely touched by the pathos of this deprecating wail, but he went on as if he had not heard it: "A woman like yourself, with a heart turned in mercy and charity toward other women who are not so strong to help themselves. Why on earth should you vex your soul with fears that she will be unkind to you, when she showed you as plain as the noonday sun her desire *to* be kind? You mustn't yield to such fancies."

"Kind, yes! But you don't understand—you *can't* understand. I shouldn't have spoken as I did. It was a mere question of a word, anyway."

Jessica smiled again, to show that, though the tears were still there, the grief behind them was to be regarded as gone, and added, "Yes, she was kindness itself."

"She is very rich in her own right, I believe, and if her interest in your project is genuine—that is, of the kind that lasts—you will hardly need any other assistance. Of course you must allow for the chance of her dropping the idea as suddenly as she picked it up. Rich women—rich people generally, for that matter—are often flighty about such things. 'Put

not your trust in princes,' serves as a warning about millionnaires as well as monarchs. The rest of us are forced to be more or less continuous in what we think and do. We have to keep at the things we've started, because a waste of time would be serious to us. We have to keep the friends and associates we've got, because others are not to be had for the asking. But these favored people are more free—their time doesn't matter, and they can find new sets of friends ready made whenever they weary of the others. Still, let us hope she will be steadfast. She has a strong face, at all events."

The girl had listened to this substantial dissertation with more or less comprehension, but with unbounded respect. Anything that Reuben Tracy said she felt must be good. Besides, his conclusion jumped with her hopes.

"I'm not afraid of her losing interest in the thing itself," she answered. "What worries me is—or, no—" She stopped herself with a smile, and made haste to add, "I forgot. I mustn't be worried. But who is our Miss Minster? Does she own the iron-works? Tell me about her."

"She owns a share of the works, I think. I don't know how big a share, or, in fact, much else about her. I've heard my partner, Horace Boyce, talk lately a good deal—"

Tracy did not finish his sentence, for Jessica had sunk suddenly into the chair behind the case, and was staring at him over the glass-bound row of bonnets with wide-open, startled eyes.

"*Your partner!* Yours, did you say? That man?"

Her tone and manner very much surprised Reuben. "Why, yes, he's my partner," he said, slowly and in wonderment. "Didn't you know that? We've been together since December."

She shook her head, and murmured something hastily about having been very busy, and being cooped up on a back street.

This did not explain her agitation, which more and more puzzled Reuben as he thought upon it. He stood looking down upon her where she sat, and noted that her face, though it was turned away from him now, was both pale and excited.

"Do you know him?" he asked finally.

She shook her head again, and the lawyer fancied she was biting her lips. He did not know well what else to say, and was speculating whether it would not be best to say nothing, when all at once she burst forth vehemently.

"I *won't* lie to you!" she exclaimed. "I *did* know him, very much to my cost. And, oh! don't you trust him! Don't you trust him, I say! He's not fit to be with you. Oh, my God!—*don't* I know Horace Boyce!"

Reuben stood silent, still looking down gravely into the girl's flashing eyes. What she had said annoyed and disturbed him, but what he thought chiefly about was how to avoid bringing on an explanation which must wound and humiliate her feelings. It was clear enough what she meant, and

he compassionately hoped she would not feel it necessary to add anything. Above all things he felt that he wanted to spare her pain.

"I understand," he said at last, as the frankest way out of the dilemma. "Don't say any more."

He pondered for a minute or so upon the propriety of not saying anything more himself, and then with decision offered her his hand across the showcase, and held hers in his expansive clasp with what he took to be fatherly sympathy, as he said:

"I must go now. Good-by. And I shall hear from you soon about the project?" He smiled to reassure her, and added, still holding her hand, "Now, don't you let worry come inside these doors at all. You have made a famous start, and everything will go well, believe me."

Then he went out, and the shrill clamor of the bell hung to jangle when the door was opened woke Jessica from her day-dream, just as the sunbeams had begun to drive away the night.

She rose with a start, and walked to the door to follow his retiring figure through the glass. She stood there, lost in another revery—vague, languorous, half-bright, half-hideous—until the door from the back room was opened, and Samantha's sharp voice fell on the silence of the little shop.

"I ain't going to set in that poky old kitchen any longer for all the bonnets in your whole place," she remarked, with determination, advancing to the mirror with the toque on her truculently poised head.

"Besides, you said you'd call us when they were all gone."

Lucinda stole up to her sister-employer, and murmured in a side-long whisper: "I couldn't keep her from listening a little. You talked too loud. She heard what you said about that Boyce chap."

The tidings angered Jessica even more than they alarmed her. With an impulse equally illogical and natural, she frowned at Samantha, and stiffened her fingers claw-wise, with a distinct itching to tear that arrangement of bronze velvet and sage-green feathers from her perfidious sister's head.

Curiously enough, it was the usually aggressive Lucinda who counselled prudence. "If I was you, I'd ask her to stay to dinner," she said, in the same furtive undertone. "I've been talking to her, and I guess she'll be all right if we make it kind o' pleasant for her when she comes. But if you rub her the wrong way, she'll scratch."

Samantha was asked to dinner, and stayed, and later, being offered her choice of three hat-pins with heads of ornamented jet, took two.

Reuben walked slowly back to the office, and then sat through a solitary meal at a side-table in the Dearborn House dining-room, although his customary seat was at the long table down the centre, in order that he might think over what he had heard.

It is not clear that the isolated fact disclosed to him in the milliner's shop would, in itself, have been sufficient to awaken in his mind any serious distrust

of his partner. As the sexes have different trainings and different spheres, so they have different standards. Men set up the bars, for instance, against a brother who cheats at cards, or divulges what he has heard in his club, or borrows money which he cannot repay, or pockets cigars at feasts when he does not himself smoke. But their courts of ethics do not exercise jurisdiction over sentimental or sexual offences, as a rule. These the male instinct vaguely refers to some other tribunal, which may or may not be in session somewhere else. And this male instinct is not necessarily co-existent with immoral tendencies, or blunted sensibilities, or even indifference: it is the man's way of looking at it—just as it is his way to cross a muddy street on his toes, while his sisters perform the same feat on their heels.

Reuben Tracy was a good man, and one with keen aspirations toward honorable and ennobling things; but still he was a man, and it may be that this discovery, standing by itself, would not seriously have affected his opinion of Horace. But it did not stand by itself.

In an indefinite kind of way, he was conscious of being less attracted by the wit and sparkling small-talk of Horace than he had been at first. Somehow, the young man seemed to have exhausted his store; he began to repeat himself, as if he had already made the circuit of the small ring around which his mind travelled. Reuben confronted a suspicion that the Boyce soil was shallow.

This might not be necessarily an evil thing, he

said to himself. Lawyers quite often achieved notable successes before juries, who were not deep or well-grounded men. Horace was versatile, and versatility was a quality which Reuben distinctly lacked. From that point of view the combination ought, therefore, to be of value.

But, then, Horace told lies. Versatility of that variety was not so admirable. There could be no doubt on this point. Reuben could count on his fingers now six separate falsehoods that his partner had already told him. They happened not to be upon vital or even important subjects, but that did not render them the more palatable.

And then there was the Minster business. He knew from other sources that Horace had been intrusted with the papers left to Mr. Clarke's executors. The young man had taken them to his father's house, and had never mentioned so much as a syllable about them to his partner. No doubt, Horace felt that he ought to have this as his personal business, and upon the precedent Reuben himself had set with the railroad work, this was fair enough. But there was something underhanded in his secrecy about the matter. He should have spoken of it.

Reuben's thoughts from this drifted to the Minsters themselves, and centred reverently upon the luminous figure of that elder daughter whom he had met an hour before. He did not dwell much upon her beauty—perhaps he was a trifle dull about such things—but her graciousness, her sweet interest in the charity, her womanly commingling of softness

and enthusiasm, seemed to shine about him as he mused. Thessaly unconsciously assumed a brighter and more wholesome aspect, with much less need of reform than before, in his mind's eye, now that he thought of it as her home.

Her home! The prosperous and respected lawyer was still a country boy in his unformed speculations as to what that home might be like. The Minster house was the most splendid mansion in Dearborn County, it was said, but his experience with mansions was small. A hundred times it had been said to him that he could go anywhere if he liked, and he gave the statement credence enough. But somehow it happened that he had not gone. To "be in society," as the phrase went, had not seemed important to him. Now, almost for the first time, he found himself regretting this. Then he smiled somewhat scowlingly at his plate as the vagrant reflection came up that his partner contributed social status as well as versatility and mendacity to the outfit of the firm. Horace Boyce had a swallow-tail coat, and visited at the Minsters'. The reflection was not altogether grateful to him.

Reuben rose from the table, and stood for a few moments by the window overlooking the veranda and the side street. The sunny warmth of the thawing noon-day had made it possible to have the window open, and the sound of voices close at hand showed that there were people already anticipating pneumonia and the springtime by sitting on the porch outside.

These voices conveyed no distinct impression at first to Reuben's mind, busy as he was with his own reflections. But all at once there was a scraping of feet and chair-legs on the floor, signifying that the party had risen, and then he heard two remarks which made a sharp appeal to his attention and interest.

The first voice said: "Mind, I'm not going to let you put me into a hole. What I do, I do only when it has been proved to me to be to my own interest, and not at all because I'm afraid of you. Understand that clearly!"

The other voice replied: "All that you need be afraid of is that you will kick over your own bucket of milk. You've got the whole game in your hands, if you only listen to me and don't play it like a fool. What do you say? Shall we go up to your house and put the thing into shape? We can be alone there."

The voices ceased, and there was a sound of footsteps descending from the porch to the sidewalk. The two men passed before the window, ducking their heads for protection against the water dripping from the overflowed eaves on the roof of the veranda, and thus missing sight of the man who had overheard them.

Reuben had known at once by the sound of the voice that the first speaker was Horace Boyce. He recognized his companion now as Schuyler Tenney, and the sight startled him.

Just why it should have done so, he could not

have explained. He had seen this Schuyler Tenney almost every day for a good many years, putting them all together, and had never before been troubled, much less alarmed, by the spectacle. But coming now upon what Jessica had told him, and what his own thoughts had evolved, and what he had inadvertently overheard, the figure of the rising hardware merchant loomed darkly in his perturbed fancy as an evil and threatening thing.

A rustic client with a grievance sought Tracy out in the seclusion of the dining-room, and dragged him back to his office and into the intricacies of the law of trespass; but though he did his best to listen and understand, the farmer went away feeling that his lawyer was a considerably overrated man.

For, strive as he might, Reuben could not get the sound of those words, "you've got the whole game in your hands," out of his ears, or restrain his mind from wearying itself with the anxious puzzle of guessing what that game could be.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SIMPLE BUSINESS TRANSACTION.

MR. SCHUYLER TENNEY had never before been afforded an opportunity of studying a young gentleman of fashion and culture in the intimacy of his private apartments, and he looked about Horace's room with lively curiosity and interest, when the two conspirators had entered the General's house, gone up-stairs, and shut doors behind them.

"It looks like a ninety-nine-cent store, for all the world," was his comment when he had examined the bric-à-brac on the walls and mantels, "hefted" a bronze trifle or two on the table, and taken a comprehensive survey of the furniture and hangings.

"It's rather bare than otherwise," said Horace, carelessly. "I got a tolerably decent lot of traps together when I had rooms in Jermyn Street, but I had to let most of them go when I pulled up stakes to come home."

"German Street? I suppose that is in Germany?"

"No—London."

"Oh! Sold 'em because you got hard up?"

"Not at all. But this damned tariff of yours—or ours—makes it cost too much to bring decent things over here."

"Protection to American industry, my boy," said Mr. Tenney, affably. "We couldn't get on a fortnight without it. Just think what—"

"Oh, hang it all, man! We didn't come here to talk tariff!" Horace broke in, with a smile which was half annoyance.

"No, that's so," assented Mr. Tenney, settling himself in the low, deep-backed easy-chair, and putting the tips of his lean fingers together. "No, we didn't, for a fact." He added, after a moment's pause: "I guess I'll have to rig up a room like this myself, when the thing comes off." He smiled icily to himself at the thought.

"Meanwhile, let us talk about the 'thing,' as you call it. Will you have a drink?"

"Never touch it," said Mr. Tenney, and he looked curiously on while Horace poured out some brandy, and then opened a bottle of soda-water to go with it. He was particularly impressed by the little wire frame-work stand made to hold the round-bottomed bottle, and asked its cost, and wondered if they wouldn't be a good thing to keep in the store.

"Now to business!" said Horace, dragging out from under a sofa the black tin box which held the Minster papers, and throwing back its cover. "I've told you pretty well what there is in here."

Mr. Tenney took from his pocket-book the tabular statement Horace had made of the Minster property, and smoothed it out over his pointed knee.

"It's a very pretty table," he said; "no book-keeper could have done it better. I know it by

heart, but we'll keep it here in sight while you proceed."

"There's nothing for me to proceed with," said Horace, lolling back in his chair in turn. "I want to hear *you*! Don't let us waste time. Broadly, what do you propose?"

"Broadly, what does everybody propose? To get for himself what somebody else has got. That's human nature. It's every kind of nature, down to the little chickens just hatched who start to chase the chap with the worm in his mouth before they've fairly got their tails out of the shell."

"You ought to write a book, Schuyler," said Horace, using this familiar name for the first time: "'Tenney on Dynamic Sociology'! But I interrupted your application. What particular worm have you got in your bill's eye?"

"We are all worms, so the Bible says. I suppose even those scrumptious ladies there come under that head, like we ordinary mortals." Mr. Tenney pointed his agreeable metaphor by touching the paper on his knee with his joined finger-tips, and showed his small, sharpened teeth in a momentary smile.

"I follow you," said Horace, tentatively. "Goon!"

"That's a heap of money that you've ciphered out there, on that paper."

"Yes. True, it isn't ours, and we've got nothing to do with it. But that's a detail. Go on!"

"A good deal of it can be ours, if you've got the pluck to go in with me."

Horace frowned. "Upon my word, Tenney," he said, impatiently, "what do you mean?"

"Jest what I said," was the sententious and collected response.

The younger man laughed with an uneasy assumption of scorn. "Is it a burglary you do me the honor to propose, or only common or garden robbery? Ought we to manage a little murder in the thing, or what do you say to arson? Upon my word, man, I believe that you don't realize that what you've said is an insult!"

"No, I don't. You're right there," said the hardware merchant, in no wise ruffled. "But I do realize that you come pretty near being the dod-blamedest fool in Dearborn County."

"Much obliged for the qualification, I'm sure," retorted Horace, who felt the mists of his half-simulated, half-instinctive anger fading away before the steady breath of the other man's purpose. "But I interrupt you. Pray go on."

"There ain't no question of dishonesty about the thing, not the slightest. I ain't that kind of a man!"

Horace permitted himself a shadowy smile, emphasized by a subdued little sniff, which Tenney caught and was pleased to appear to resent.

"Thessaly knows me!" he said, with an air of pride. "They ain't a living man—nor a dead one nuther—can put his finger on me. I've lived above-board, sir, and owe no man a red cent, and I defy anybody to so much as whisper a word about my character."

"'Tenney on Faith Justified by Works,'" commented Horace, softly, smiling as much as he dared, but in a less aggressive manner.

"Works—yes!" said the hardware merchant, "the Minster iron-works, in particular." He seemed pleased with his little joke, and paused to dwell upon it in his mind for an instant. Then he went on, sitting upright in his chair now, and displaying a new earnestness:

"Dishonesty is wrong, and it is foolish. It gets a man disgraced, and it gets him in jail. But commercial acumen is another thing. A smart man can get money in a good many ways without giving anybody a chance to call him dishonest. I have thought out several plans—some of them strong at one point, others at another, but all pretty middlin' good—how to feather our own nests out of this thing."

"Well?" said Horace, interrogatively.

Mr. Tenney did not smile any more, and he had done with digressions. "First of all," he said, with his intent gray eyes fixed on the young man's face, "what guarantee have I that you won't give me away?"

"What guarantee *can* I give you?" replied Horace, also sitting up.

"Perhaps you are right," said Tenney, thinking in his own swift-working mind that it would be easy enough to take care of this poor creature later on. "Well, then, you've been appointed Mrs. Minster's lawyer in the interest of the Thessaly Manufacturing Company—this company here marked 'D,' in which

the family has one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars."

"I gathered as much. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me what it is all about."

"I'm as transparent as plate-glass when I think a man is acting square with me," said the hardware merchant. "This is how it is. Wendover and me got hold of a little rolling-mill and nail-works at Cadmus, down on the Southern Tier, a few years ago. Some silly people had put up the money for it, and there was a sort of half-crazy inventor fellow running it. They were making ducks and drakes of the whole thing, and I saw a chance of getting into the concern—I used to buy a good deal of hardware from them, and knew how they stood—and I spoke to Wendover, and so we went in."

"That means that the other people were put out, I suppose," commented Horace.

"Well, no; but they kind o' faded away like. I wouldn't exactly say they were put out, but after a while they didn't seem to be able to stay in. But never mind them. Well, Cadmus was a bad location. The iron fields around there had pretty well petered out, and we were way off the main line of transportation. Business was fair enough; we made a straight ten per cent. year in and year out, because the thing was managed carefully; but that was in spite of a lot of drawbacks. So I got a scheme in my head to move the whole concern up here to Thessaly, and hitch it up with the Minster iron-works. We could save one dollar a ton, or forty-five thousand dollars

in all, in the mere matter of freight alone, if we could use up their entire output. I may tell you, I didn't appear in the business at all. I daresay Mrs. Minister don't know to this day that I'm a kind of partner of hers. It happened that Wendover used to know her when she was a girl—they both come from down the Hudson somewhere—and so he worked the thing with her, and we moved over from Cadmus, hook, line, bob, and sinker, and we're the Thessaly Manufacturing Company. Do you see?"

"So far, yes. She and her daughters have one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars cash in it. What is the rest of the company like?"

"It's stocked at four hundred thousand dollars. We put in all our plant and machinery and business and good-will and so on at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and then we furnished seventy-five thousand dollars cash. So we hold two hundred and twenty-five shares to their one hundred and seventy-five."

"Who are the 'we'?"

"Well, Pete Wendover and me are about the only people you're liable to meet around the premises, I guess. There are some other names on the books, but they don't amount to much. We can wipe them off whenever we like."

"I notice that this company has paid no dividends since it was formed."

"That's because of the expense of building. And we ain't got what you may call fairly to work yet. But it's all right. There is big money in it."

"I daresay," observed Horace. "But, if you will excuse the remark, I seem to have missed that part of your statement which referred to *my* making something out of the company."

The hardware merchant allowed his cold eyes to twinkle for an instant. "You'll be taken care of," he said, confidentially. "Don't fret your gizzard about *that*!"

Horace smiled. It seemed to be easier to get on with Tenney than he had thought. "But what am I to do; that is, if I decide to do anything?" he asked. "I confess I don't see your scheme."

"Why, that's curious," said the other, with an air of candor. "And you lawyers have the name of being so 'cute, too!'"

"I don't suppose we see through a stone wall much farther than other people. Our chief advantage is in being able to recognize that it is a wall. And this one of yours seems to be as thick and opaque as most, I'm bound to say."

"We don't want you to do anything, just now," Mr. Tenney explained. "Things may turn up in which you can be of assistance, and then we want to count on you, that's all."

This was a far less lucid explanation than Horace had looked for. Tenney had been so anxious for a confidential talk, and had hinted of such dazzling secrets, that this was a distinct disappointment.

"What did you mean by saying that I had the whole game in my hands?" he demanded, not dis-

sembling his annoyance. "Thus far, you haven't even dealt me any cards!"

Mr. Tenney lay back in his chair again, and surveyed Horace over his finger-tips. "There is to be a game, young man, and you've been put in a position to play in it when the time comes. But I should be a particularly simple kind of goose to tell you about it beforehand; now, wouldn't I?"

Thus candidly appealed to, Horace could not but admit that his companion's caution was defensible.

"Please yourself," he said. "I daresay you're right enough. I've got the position, as you say. Perhaps it is through you that it came to me; I'll concede that, for argument's sake. You are not a man who expects people to act from gratitude alone. Therefore you don't count upon my doing things for you in this position, even though you put me there, unless you first convince me that they will also benefit me. That is clear enough, isn't it? Very well; thus the matter stands. When the occasion arises that you need me, you can tell me what it is, and what I am to get out of it, and then we'll talk business."

Mr. Tenney had not lifted his eyes for a moment from his companion's face. Had his own countenance been one on which inner feelings were easily reflected, it would just now have worn an expression of amused contempt.

"Well, this much I might as well tell you straight off," he said. "A part of my notion, if everything goes smoothly, is to have Mrs. Minster put you into

the Thessaly Manufacturing Company as her representative and to pay you five thousand dollars a year for it, which might be fixed so as to stand separate from the other work you do for her. Wendover can arrange that with her. And then I am counting now on declaring myself up at the Minster works, and putting in my time up there; so that your father will be needed again in the store, and it might be so that I could double his salary, and let him have back say a half interest in the business, and put him on his feet. I say these things *might* be done. I don't say I've settled on them, mind!"

"And you still think it best to keep me in the dark; not to tell me what it is I'm to do?" Horace leant forward, and asked this question eagerly.

"No-o—I'll tell you this much. Your business will be to say ditto to whatever me and Wendover say."

A full minute's pause ensued, during which Mr. Tenney gravely watched Horace sip what remained of his drink.

"Well, what shall it be? Do you go in with us?" he asked, at last.

"I'd better think it over," said Horace. "Give me, say, till Monday—that's five days. And of course, if I do say yes, it will be understood that I am not to be bound to do anything of a shady character."

"Certainly; but you needn't worry about that," answered Tenney. "Everything will be as straight

as a die. There will be nothing but a simple business transaction."

"What did you mean by saying that we should take some of the Minster money away? That had a queer sound."

"All business consists in getting other people's money," said the hardware merchant, sententiously. "Where do you suppose Steve Minster got his millions? Did you think he minted them? Didn't every dollar pass through some other fellow's pocket before it reached his? The only difference was that when it got into his pocket it stuck there. Everybody is looking out to get rich; and when a man succeeds, it only means that somebody else has got poor. That's plain common-sense!"

The conversation practically ended here. Mr. Tenney devoted some quarter of an hour to going severally over all the papers in the Minster box, but glancing through only those few which referred to the Thessaly Manufacturing Company. The proceeding seemed to Horace to be irregular, but he could not well refuse, and Tenney was not interrupted. When he had finished his task he shook hands with Horace with a novel cordiality, and it was not difficult to guess that the result of his search had pleased him.

"You are sure those are all the papers Clarke left to be turned over?" he asked. Upon being assured in the affirmative his eyes emitted a glance which was like a flash of light, and his lip lifted in a smile of obvious elation.

"There's a fortune for both of us," he said, jubilantly, as he unlocked the door, and shook hands again.

When he had gone, Horace poured out another drink and sat down to meditate.

CHAPTER XIX.

NO MESSAGE FOR MAMMA.

FOUR days of anxious meditation did not help Horace Boyce to clear his mind, and on the fifth he determined upon a somewhat desperate step, in the hope that its issue would assist decision.

His dilemma was simple enough in character. Two ways of acquiring a fortune lay before him. One was to marry Kate Minster; the other was to join the plot against her property and that of her family, which the subtile Tenney was darkly shaping.

The misery of the situation was that he must decide at once which of the ways he would choose. In his elation at being selected as the legal adviser and agent of these millionnaire women, no such contingency as this had been foreseen. He had assumed that abundant time would be at his disposal, and he had said to himself that with time all things may be accomplished with all women.

But this precious element of time had been harshly cut out of his plans, here at the very start. The few days reluctantly granted him had gone by, one by one, with cruel swiftness, and to-morrow would be Monday—and still his mind was not made up.

If he could be assured that Miss Minster would

marry him, or at least admit him to the vantage-ground of *quasi*-recognition as a suitor, the difficulty would be solved at once. He would turn around and defend her and her people against the machinations of Tenney. Just what the machinations were he could not for the life of him puzzle out, but he felt sure that, whatever their nature, he could defeat them, if only he were given the right to do battle in the name of the family, as a prospective member of it.

On the other hand, it might be that he had no present chance with Miss Minster as an eligible husband. What would happen if he relied on a prospect which turned out not to exist? His own opportunity to share in the profits of Tenney's plan would be abruptly extinguished, and his father would be thrown upon the world as a discredited bankrupt. About that there was no doubt.

Sometimes the distracted young man thought he caught glimpses of a safe middle course. In these sanguine moments it seemed feasible to give in his adhesion to Tenney's scheme, and go along with him for a certain time, say until the intentions of the conspirators were revealed. Then he might suddenly revolt, throw himself into a virtuous attitude, and win credit and gratitude at the hands of the family by protecting them from their enemies. Then the game would be in his own hands, and no mistake!

But there were other times when this course did not present so many attractions to his mind—when it was borne in upon him that Tenney would be a

dangerous kind of man to betray. He had seen merciless and terrible depths in the gray eyes of the hardware merchant—depths which somehow suggested bones stripped clean of their flesh, sucked bare of their marrow, at the bottom of a gloomy sea. In these seasons of doubt, which came mostly in the early morning when he first awoke, the mere thought of Tenney's hatred made him shudder. It was as if Hugo's devil-fish had crawled into his dreams.

So Sunday afternoon came and found the young man still perplexed and harassed. To do him justice, he had once or twice dwelt momentarily on the plan of simply defying Tenney and doing his duty by the Minsters, and taking his chances. But these impulses were as quickly put down. The case was too complicated for mere honesty. The days of martyrdom were long since past. One needed to be smarter than one's neighbors in these later times. To eat others was the rule now, if one would save himself from being devoured. It was at least clear to his mind that he must be smart, and play his hand so as to get the odd trick even if honors were held against him.

Horace decided finally that the wisest thing he could do would be to call upon the Minsters before nightfall, and trust to luck for some opportunity of discovering Miss Kate's state of mind toward him. He was troubled more or less by fears that Sunday might not be regarded in Thessaly as a proper day for calls, as he dressed himself for the adventure. But when he got upon the street, the fresh air and

exhilaration or exercise helped to reassure him. Before he reached the Minster gate he had even grown to feel that the ladies had probably had a dull day of it, and would welcome his advent as a diversion.

He was shown into the stately parlor to the left of the wide hall—a room he had not seen before—and left to sit there in solitude for some minutes. This term of waiting he employed in looking over the portraits on the wall and the photographs on the mantels and tables. Aside from several pictures of the dissipated Minster boy who had died, he could see no faces of young men anywhere, and he felt this to be a good sign as he tiptoed his way back to his seat by the window.

Fortune smiled at least upon the opening of his enterprise. It was Miss Kate who came at last to receive him, and she came alone. The young man's cultured sense of beauty and breeding was caressed and captivated as it had never been before—at least in America, he made mental reservation—as she came across the room toward him, and held out her hand. He felt himself unexpectedly at ease, as he returned her greeting and looked with smiling warmth into her splendid eyes.

His talk was facile and pleasant. He touched lightly upon his doubts as to making calls on Sunday, and how they were overborne by the unspeakable tedium of his own rooms. Then he spoke of the way the more unconventional circles of London utilize the day, and of the contrasting features of

the Continental Sunday. Miss Kate seemed interested, and besides explaining that her mother was writing letters and that her sister was not very well, bore a courteous and affable part in the exchange of small-talk.

For a long time nothing was said which enabled Horace to feel that the purpose of his visit had been or was likely to be served. Then, all at once, through a most unlikely channel, the needed personal element was introduced.

"Mamma tells me," she said, when a moment's pause had sufficed to dismiss some other subject, "that she has turned over to you such of her business as poor old Mr. Clarke used to take care of, and that your partner, Mr. Tracy, has nothing to do with that particular branch of your work. Isn't that unusual? I thought partners always shared everything."

"Oh, not at all," replied Horace. "Mr. Tracy, for example, has railroad business which he keeps to himself. He is the attorney for this section of the road, and of course that is a personal appointment. He couldn't share it with me, any more than the man in the story could make his wife and children corporals because he had been made one himself. Besides, Mr. Tracy was expressly mentioned by your mother as not to be included in the transfer of business. It was her notion."

"Ah, indeed!" said that young woman, with a slight instantaneous lifting of the black brows which Horace did not catch. "Why? Isn't he nice?"

"Well, yes ; he's an extremely good fellow, in his way," the partner admitted, looking down at his glossy boots in well-simulated hesitation. "That little word 'nice' means so many things upon feminine lips, you know," he added with a smile. "Perhaps he wouldn't answer your definition of it all around. He's very honest, and he is a prodigious worker, but—well, to be frank, he's farm bred, and I daresay your mother suspected the existence of—what shall I say?—an uncouth side? Really, I don't think that there was anything more than that in it."

"So you furnish the polish, and he the honesty and industry? Is that it?"

The words were distinctly unpleasant, and Horace looked up swiftly to the speaker's face, feeling that his own was flushed. But Miss Kate was smiling at him, with a quizzical light dancing in her eyes, and this reassured him on the instant. Evidently she felt herself on easy terms with him, and this was merely a bit of playful chaff.

"We don't put it quite in that way," he said, with an answering laugh. "It would be rather egotistical, on both sides."

"Nowadays everybody resents that imputation as if it were a cardinal sin. There was a time when self-esteem was taken for granted. I suppose it went out with chain-armor and farthingales." She spoke in a musing tone, and added after a tiny pause, "That must have been a happy time, at least for those who wore the armor and the brocades."

Horace leaped with avidity at the opening. "Those were the days of romance," he said, with an effort at the cooing effect in his voice. "Perhaps they were not so altogether lovely as our fancy paints them; but, all the same, it is very sweet to have the fancy. Whether it be historically true or not, those who possess it are rich in their own mind's right. They can always escape from the grimy and commercial conditions of this present work-a-day life. All one's finer senses can feed, for example, on a glowing account of an old-time tournament—with the sun shining on the armor and burnished shields, and the waving plumes and iron-clad horses and the heralds in tabards, and the rows of fair ladies clustered about the throne—as it is impossible to do on the report of a meeting of a board of directors, even when they declare you an exceptionally large dividend."

The young man kept a close watch upon this flow of words as it proceeded, and felt satisfied with it. The young woman seemed to like it too, for she had sunk back into her chair with an added air of ease, and looked at him now with what he took to be a more sympathetic glance, as she made answer:

"Why, you are positively romantic, Mr. Boyce!"

"Me? My dear Miss Minster, I am the most sentimental person alive," Horace protested gayly.

"Don't you find that it interferes with your profession?" she asked, with that sparkle of banter in her dark eyes which he began to find so delicious. "I thought lawyers had to eschew sentiment. Or

perhaps you supply *that*, too, in this famous partnership of yours!"

Horace laughed with pleasure. "Would you like me the less if I admitted it?" he queried.

"How could I?" she replied on the instant, still with the smile which kept him from shaping a harsh interpretation of her words. "But isn't Thessaly a rather incongruous place for sentimental people? We have no tourney-field—only rolling-mills and button-factories and furnaces; and there isn't a knight, much less a herald in a tabard, left in the whole village. Their places have been taken by moulders and puddlers. So what will the minstrel do then, poor thing?"

"Let him come here sometimes," said the young man, in the gravely ardent tone which this sort of situation demanded. "Let him come here, and forget that this is the nineteenth century; forget time and Thessaly altogether."

"Oh, but mamma wouldn't like that at all; I mean about your forgetting so much. She expects you particularly to remember both time *and* Thessaly. No, decidedly; that would never do!"

The smile and the glance were intoxicating. The young man made his plunge.

"But *may* I come?" His voice had become low and vibrant, and it went on eagerly: "May I come if I promise to remember everything; if I swear to remember nothing else save what you—and your mother—would have me charge my memory with?"

"We are always glad to see our friends on Tuesdays, from two to five."

"But I am not in the plural," he urged, gently.

"We are," she made answer, still watching him with a smile, from where she half-reclined in the easy-chair. Her face was in the shadow of the heavier under-curtains; the mellow light gave it a uniform tint of ivory washed with rose, and enriched the wonder of her eyes, and softened into melting witchery the lines of lips and brows and of the raven diadem of curls upon her forehead.

"Yes; in that the graces and charms of a thousand perfect women are centred here in one," murmured Horace. It was in his heart as well as his head to say more, but now she rose abruptly at this, with a laugh which for the instant disconcerted him.

"Oh, I foresee *such* a future for this firm of yours," she cried, with high merriment alike in voice and face.

As they both stood in the full light of the window, the young man somehow seemed to miss that yielding softness in her face which had lulled his sense and fired his senses in the misleading shadows of the curtain. It was still a very beautiful face, but there was a great deal of self-possession in it. Perhaps it would be as well just now to go no further.

"We must try to live up to your good opinion, and your kindly forecast," he said, as he momentarily touched the hand she offered him. "You cannot possibly imagine how glad I am to have braved

the conventionalities in calling, and to have found you at home. It has transformed the rural Sunday from a burden into a beatitude."

"How pretty, Mr. Boyce! Is there any message for mamma?"

"Oh, why did you say that?" He ventured upon a tone of mock vexation. "I wanted so much to go away with the fancy that this was an enchanted palace, and that you were shut up alone in it, waiting for—"

"Tuesdays, from two till five," she broke in, with a bow, in the same spirit of amiable raillery, and so he said good-by and made his way out.

Had he succeeded? Was there a promise of success? Horace took a long walk before he finally turned his steps homeward, and pondered these problems excitedly in his mind. On the whole, he concluded that he could win her. That she was for herself better worth the winning than even for her million, he said to himself over and over again with rapture.

Miss Kate went up-stairs and into the sitting-room common to the sisters, in which Ethel lay on the sofa in front of the fire-place. She knelt beside this sofa, and held her hands over the subdued flame of the maple sticks on the hearth.

"It is so cold down in the parlor," she remarked, by way of explanation.

"He stayed an unconscionable while," said Ethel. "What could he have talked about? I had almost

a mind to waive my headache and come down to find out. It was a full hour."

"He wouldn't have thanked you if you had, my little girl," replied Kate with a smile.

"Does he dislike little girls of nineteen so much? How unique!"

"No; but he came to make love to the big girl; that is why."

Ethel sat bolt upright. "You don't mean it!" she said, with her hazel eyes wide open.

"*He* did," was the sententious reply. Kate was busy warming the backs of her hands now.

"Goodness me! And I lay here all the while, and never had so much as a premonition. Oh, what was it like? Did he get on his knees? Was it very, *very* funny? Make haste and tell me."

"Well, it *was* funny, after a fashion. At least, we both laughed a good deal."

"How touching! Well?"

"That is all. I laughed at him, and he laughed—I suppose it must have been at me—and he paid me some quite thrilling compliments, and I replied, 'Tuesdays, from two to five,' like an educated jack-daw—and—that was all."

"What a romance! How could you think of such a clever answer, right on the spur of the moment, too? But I always said you were the bright one of the family, Kate. Perhaps one's mind works better in the cold, anyway. But I think he *might* have knelt down. You should have put him close to the register. I daresay the cold stiffened his joints."

"Will you ever be serious, child?"

Ethel took her sister's head in her hands and turned it gently, so that she might look into the other's face.

"Is it possible that *you* are serious, Kate?" she asked, in tender wonderment.

The elder girl laughed, and lifted herself to sit on the sofa beside Ethel.

"No, no; of course it isn't possible," she said, and put her arm about the invalid's slender waist. "But he's great fun to talk to. I chaffed him to my heart's content, and he saw what I meant, every time, and didn't mind in the least, and gave me as good as I sent. It's such a relief to find somebody you can say saucy things to, and be quite sure they understand them. I began by disliking him—and he *is* as conceited as a popinjay—but then he comprehended everything so perfectly, and talked so well, that positively I found myself enjoying it. And he knew his own mind, too, and was resolved to say nice things to me, and said them, whether I liked or not."

"But *did* you 'like,' Kate?"

"No-o, I think not," the girl replied, musingly. "But, all the same, there was a kind of satisfaction in hearing them, don't you know?"

The younger girl drew her sister's head down to her shoulder, and caressed it with her thin, white fingers.

"You are not going to let your mind drift into anything foolish, Kate?" she said, with a quaver of

anxiety in her tone. "You don't know the man. You don't even like him. You told me so, even from what you saw of him on the train coming from New York. You said he patronized everybody and everything, and didn't have a good word to say for any one. Don't you know you did? And those first impressions are always nearest the truth."

This recalled something to Kate's mind. "You are right, puss," she said. "It *is* a failing of his. He spoke to-day almost contemptuously of his partner—that Mr. Tracy whom I met in the milliner's shop; and that annoyed me at the time, for I liked Mr. Tracy's looks and talk very much indeed. I shouldn't call him uncouth, at all."

"That was that Boyce man's word, was it?" commented Ethel. "Well, then, I think that beside his partner, he is a pretentious, disagreeable monkey—there!"

Kate smiled at her sister's vehemence. "At least it is an unprejudiced judgment," she said. "You don't know either of them."

"But I've seen them both," replied Ethel, conclusively.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN FROM NEW YORK.

IN the great field of armed politics in Europe, every now and again there arises a situation which everybody agrees must inevitably result in war. Yet just when the newspapers have reached their highest state of excitement, and "sensational incidents" and "significant occurrences" are crowding one another in the hurly-burly of alarmist despatches with utmost impressiveness, somehow the cloud passes away, and the sun comes out again—and nothing has happened.

The sun did not precisely shine for Horace Boyce in the weeks which now ensued, but at least the crisis that had threatened to engulf him was curiously delayed. Mr. Tenney did not even ask him, on that dreaded Monday, what decision he had arrived at. A number of other Mondays went by, and still no demand was made upon him to announce his choice. On the few occasions when he met his father's partner, it was the pleasure of that gentleman to talk on other subjects.

The young man began to regain his equanimity. The February term of Oyer and Terminer had come and gone, and Horace was reasonably satisfied with the forensic display he had made. It would have

been much better, he knew, if he had not been worried about the other thing; but, as it was, he had won two of the four cases in which he appeared, had got on well with the judge, who invited him to dinner at the Dearborn House, and had been congratulated on his speeches by quite a number of lawyers. His foothold in Thessaly was established.

Matters about the office had not gone altogether to his liking, it was true. For some reason, Reuben seemed all at once to have become more distant and formal with him. Horace could not dream that this arose from the discoveries his partner had made at the milliner's shop, and so put the changed demeanor down vaguely to Reuben's jealousy of his success in court. He was sorry that this was so, because he liked Reuben personally, and the silly fellow ought to be glad that he had such a showy and clever partner, instead of sulking. Horace began to harbor the notion that a year of this partnership would probably be enough for him.

The Citizens' Club had held two meetings, and Horace felt that the manner in which he had presided and directed the course of action at these gatherings had increased his hold upon the town. Nearly fifty men had now joined the club, and next month they were to discuss the question of a permanent habitation. They all seemed to like him as president, and nebulous thoughts about being the first mayor of Thessaly, when the village should get its charter, now occasionally floated across the young man's mind.

He had called at the Minster house on each Tuesday since that conversation with Miss Kate, and now felt himself to be on terms almost intimate with the whole household. He could not say, even to himself, that his suit had progressed much; but Miss Kate seemed to like him, and her mother, whom he also had seen at other times on matters of business, was very friendly indeed.

Thus affairs stood with the rising young lawyer at the beginning of March, when he one day received a note sent across by hand from Mr. Tenney, asking him to come over at once to the Dearborn House, and meet him in a certain room designated by number.

Horace was conscious of some passing surprise that Tenney should make appointments in private rooms of the local hotel, but as he crossed the street to the old tavern and climbed the stairs to the apartment named, it did not occur to him that the summons might signify that the crisis which had darkened the first weeks of February was come again.

He found Tenney awaiting him at the door, and after he had perfunctorily shaken hands with him, discovered that there was another man inside, seated at the table in the centre of the parlor, under the chandelier. This man was past middle-age, and both his hair and the thick, short beard which covered his chin and throat were nearly white. Horace noted first that his long upper lip was shaven, and this grated upon him afresh as one of the least lovely of provincial American customs. Then he observed

that this man had eyes like Tenney's in expression, though they were blue instead of gray; and as this resemblance came to him, Tenney spoke:

"Judge Wendover, this is the young man we've been talking about—Mr. Horace Boyce, son of my partner, the General, you know."

The mysterious New Yorker had at last appeared on the scene, then. He did not look very mysterious, or very metropolitan either, as he rose slowly and reached his hand across the table for Horace to shake. It was a fat and inert hand, and the Judge himself, now that he stood up, was seen to be also fat and dumpy in figure, with a bald head, noticeably high at the back of the skull, and a loose, badly fitted suit of clothes.

"Sit down," he said to Horace, much as if that young man had been a stenographer called in to report a conversation. Horace took the chair indicated, not over pleased.

"I haven't got much time," the Judge continued, speaking apparently to the papers in front of him. "There's a good deal to do, and I've got to catch that 5.22 train."

"New Yorkers generally do have to catch trains," remarked Horace. "So far as I could see, the few times I've been there of late years, that is always the chief thing on their minds."

Judge Wendover looked at the young man for the space of a second, and then turned to Tenney and said abruptly:

"I suppose he knows how the Thessaly Mfg.

Company stands? How it's stocked?" He pronounced the three letters with a slurring swiftness, as if to indicate that there was not time enough for the full word "manufacturing."

Horace himself answered the question: "Yes, I know. You represent two hundred and twenty-five to my clients' one hundred and seventy-five." The young man held himself erect and alert in his chair, and spoke curtly.

"Just so. The capital is four hundred thousand dollars—all paid up. Well, we need that much more to go on."

"How 'go on'? What do you mean?"

"There's a new nail machine just out which makes our plant worthless. To buy that, and make the changes, will cost a round four hundred thousand dollars. Get hold of that machine, and we control the whole United States market; fail to get it, we go under. That's the long and short of it. That's why we sent for you."

"I'm very sorry," said Horace, "but I don't happen to have four hundred thousand dollars with me just at the moment. If you'd let me known earlier, now."

The Judge looked at him again, with the impersonal point-blank stare of a very rich and pre-occupied old man. Evidently this young fellow thought himself a joker.

"Don't fool," he said, testily. "Business is business, time is money. We can't increase our capital by law, but we can borrow. You haven't got any

money, but the Minster women have. It's to their interest to stand by us. They've got almost as much in the concern as we have. I've seen the widow and explained the situation to her. She understands it. But she won't back our paper, because her husband on his death-bed made her promise never to do that for anybody. Curious prejudice these countrymen have about indorsing notes. Business would stagnate in a day without indorsing. However, I had another plan. Let her issue four hundred thousand dollars in bonds on the iron-works. That's about a third what they are worth. She'll consent to that if you talk to her."

"Oh, *that's* where I come in, is it?" said Horace.

"Where else did you suppose?" asked the Judge, puffing for breath, as he eyed the young man.

No answer was forthcoming, and the New Yorker went on:

"The interest on those bonds will cost her twenty-four thousand dollars per year for a year or two, but it will make her shares in the Mfg. Company a real property instead of a paper asset. Besides, I've shown her a way to-day, by going into the big pig-iron trust that is being formed, of making twice that amount in half the time. Now, she's going to talk with you about both these things. Your play is to advise her to do what I've suggested."

"Why should I?" Horace put the question bluntly.

"I'll tell you," answered the Judge, who seemed to like this direct way of dealing. "You can make a pot of money by it. And that isn't all. Tenney and I are not fishing with pin-hooks and thread. We've got nets, young man. You tie up to us, and we'll take care of you. When you see a big thing like this travelling your way, hitch on to it. That's the way fortunes are made. And you've got a chance that don't come to one young fellow in ten thousand."

"I should think he had," put in Mr. Tenney, who had been a silent but attentive auditor.

"What will happen if I decline?" asked Horace.

"She will lose her one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars and a good deal more, and you will lose your business with her and with everybody else."

"And your father will lose the precious little he's got left," put in Mr. Tenney.

Horace tried to smile. "Upon my word, you are frank," he said.

"There's no time to be anything else," replied the Judge. "And why shouldn't we be? We simply state facts to you. A great commercial transaction, involving profits to everybody, is outlined before you. It happens that by my recommendation you are in a place where you can embarrass its success, for a minute or two, if you have a mind to. But why in God's name you should have a mind to, or why you take up time by pretending to be offish

about it, is more than I can make out. Damn it, sir, you're not a woman, who wants to be asked a dozen times! You're a man, lucky enough to be associated with other men who have their heads screwed on the right way, and so don't waste any more time."

"Oh, that reminds me," said Horace, "I haven't thanked you for recommending me."

"You needn't," replied the Judge, bluntly. "It was Tenney's doing. I didn't know you from a side of sole-leather. But *he* thought you were the right man for the place."

"I hope you are not disappointed," Horace remarked, with a questioning smile.

"A minute will tell me whether I am or not," the New York man exclaimed, letting his fat hand fall upon the table. "Come, what is your answer? Are you with us, or against us?"

"At all events not against you, I should hope."

"Damn the man! Hasn't he got a 'yes' or 'no' in him?—Tenney, you're to blame for this," snapped Wendover, pulling his watch from the fob in his tightened waistband, and scowling at the dial. "I'll have to run, as it is."

He rose again from his chair, and bent a sharp gaze upon Horace's face.

"Well, young man," he demanded, "what is your answer?"

"I think I can see my way to obliging you," said Horace, hesitatingly. "But, of course, I want to know just how I am to stand in the—"

"That Tenney will see to," said the Judge, swiftly. He gathered up the papers on the table, thrust them into a portfolio with a lock on it, which he gave to Tenney, snatched his hat, and was gone, without a word of adieu to anybody.

"Great man of business, that!" remarked the hardware merchant, after a moment of silence.

Horace nodded assent, but his mind had not followed the waddling figure of the financier. It was dwelling perplexedly upon the outcome of this adventure upon which he seemed to be fully embarked, and trying to establish a conviction that it would be easy to withdraw from it at will, later on.

"He can make millions where other men only see thousands, and they beyond their reach," pursued Tenney, in an abstracted voice. "When he's your friend, there isn't anything you can't do; and he's as straight as a string, too, so long as he likes a man. But he's a terror to have ag'in you."

Horace sat closeted with Tenney for a long time, learning the details of the two plans which had been presented to Mrs. Minster, and which he was expected to support. The sharpest scrutiny could detect nothing dishonest in them. Both involved mere questions of expediency—to loan money in support of one's stock, and to enter a trust which was to raise the price of one's wares—and it was not difficult for Horace to argue himself into the belief that both promised to be beneficial to his client.

At the close of the interview Horace said plainly

to his companion that he saw no reason why he should not advise Mrs. Minster to adopt both of the Judge's recommendations. "They seem perfectly straightforward," he added.

"Did you expect anything else, knowing me all this while?" asked Tenney, reproachfully.

CHAPTER XXI.

REUBEN'S MOMENTOUS FIRST VISIT.

SOME ten days later, Reuben Tracy was vastly surprised one afternoon to receive a note from Miss Minster. The office-boy said that the messenger was waiting for an answer, and had been warned to hand the missive to no one except him. The note ran thus :

DEAR SIR : I hope very much that you can find time to call here at our house during the afternoon. Pray ask for me, and do not mention *to any one* that you are coming.

It will not seem to you, I am sure, that I have taken a liberty either in my request or my injunction, after you have heard the explanation.

Sincerely yours,

KATE MINSTER.

Reuben sent back a written line to say that he would come within an hour, and then tried to devote himself to the labor of finishing promptly the task he had in hand. It was a very simple piece of conveyancing—work he generally performed with facility—but to-day he found himself spoiling sheet after sheet of “legal cap,” by stupid omissions and unconscious inversions of the quaint legal phraseology. His thoughts would not be enticed away from the subject of the note—the perfume of which was

apparent upon the musty air of the office, even as it lay in its envelope before him. There was nothing remarkable in the fact that Miss Minster wanted to see him—of course, it was with reference to Jessica's plan for the factory-girls—but the admonition to secrecy puzzled him a good deal. The word "explanation," too, had a portentous look. What could it mean?

Mrs. Minster had been closeted in the library with her lawyer, Mr. Horace Boyce, for fully two hours that forenoon, and afterward, in the hearing of her daughters, had invited him to stay for luncheon. He had pleaded pressure of business as an excuse for not accepting the invitation, and had taken a hurried departure forthwith.

The two girls exchanged glances at all this. Mr. Boyce had never been asked before to the family table, and there was something pre-occupied, almost brusque, in his manner of declining the exceptional honor and hurrying off as he did. They noted, too, that their mother seemed unwontedly excited about something, and experience told them that her calm Knickerbocker nature was not to be stirred by trivial matters.

So, while they lingered over the jellied dainties of the light noonday meal, Kate made bold to put the question:

"Something is worrying you, mamma," she said. "Is it anything that we know about?"

"Mercy, no!" Mrs. Minster replied. "It is noth-

ing at all. Of course, I'm not worried. What an idea!"

"I thought you acted as if there was something on your mind," said Kate.

"Well, you would act so, too, if—" There Mrs. Minster stopped short, and sighed.

"If what, mamma?" put in Ethel. "We *knew* there was something."

"He sticks to it that issuing bonds is not mortgaging, and, of course, he ought to know; but I remember that when they bonded our town for the Harlem road, father said it *was* a mortgage," answered the mother, not over luminously.

"What bonds? What mortgage?" Kate spoke with emphasis. "We have a right to know, surely!"

"However, you can see for yourself," pursued Mrs. Minster, "that the interest must be more than made up by the extra price iron will bring when the trust puts up prices. That is what trusts are for—to put up prices. You can read that in the papers every day."

"Mother, what have you done?"

Kate had pushed back her plate, and leaned over the table now, flashing sharp inquiry into her mother's face.

"What have you done?" she repeated. "I insist upon knowing, and so does Ethel."

Mrs. Minster's wise and resolute countenance never more thoroughly belied the condition of her mind than at this moment. She felt that she did not rightly know just what she had done, and vague

fears as to consequences rose to possess her soul.

"If I had spoken to my mother in that way when I was your age, I should have been sent from the room—big girl though I was. I'm sure I can't guess where you take your temper from. The Mauverensens were always—"

This was not satisfactory, and Kate broke into the discourse about her maternal ancestors peremptorily :

"I don't care about all that. But some business step has been taken, and it must concern Ethel and me, and I wish you would tell us plainly what it is."

"The Thessaly Company found it necessary to buy the right of a new nail machine, and they had to have money to do it with, and so some bonds are to be issued to provide it. It is quite the customary thing, I assure you, in business affairs. Only, what I maintained was that it *was* the same as a mortgage, but Judge Wendover and Mr. Boyce insisted it wasn't."

It is, perhaps, an interesting commentary upon the commercial education of these two wealthy young ladies, that they themselves were unable to form an opinion upon this debated point.

"Bonds are something like stocks," Ethel explained. "They are always mentioned together. But mortgages must be different, for they are kept in the county clerk's office. I know that, because Ella Dupont's father used to get paid fifty cents apiece for searching after them there. She told me

so. They must have been very careless to lose them so often."

Mrs. Minster in some way regarded this as a defence of her action, and took heart. "Well, then, I also signed an agreement which puts us into the great combination they're getting up—all the iron manufacturers of Pennsylvania and Ohio and New York—called the Amalgamated Pig-Iron Trust. I was very strongly advised to do that; and it stands to reason that prices will go up, because trusts limit production. Surely, that is plain enough."

"You ought to have consulted us," said Kate, not the less firmly because her advice, she knew, would have been of no earthly value. "You have a power-of-attorney to sign for us, but it was really for routine matters, so that the property might act as a whole. In a great matter like this, I think we should have known about it first."

"But you don't know anything about it now, even when I *have* told you!" Mrs. Minster pointed out, not without justification for her triumphant tone. "It is perfectly useless for us women to try and understand these things. Our only safety is in being advised by men who do know, and in whom we have perfect confidence."

"But Mr. Boyce is a very young man, and you scarcely know him," objected Ethel.

"He was strongly recommended to me by Judge Wendover," replied the mother.

"And pray who recommended Judge Wendover?" asked Kate, with latent sarcasm.

"Why, he was born in the same town with me!" said Mrs. Minster, as if no answer could be more sufficient. "My grandfather Douw Mauverensen's sister married a Wendover."

"But about the bonds," pursued the eldest daughter. "What amount of money do they represent?"

"Four hundred thousand dollars."

The girls opened their eyes at this, and their mother hastened to add: "But it really isn't very important, when you come to look at it. It is only what Judge Wendover calls making one hand wash the other. The money raised on the bonds will put the Thessaly Company on its feet, and so then that will pay dividends, and so we will get back the interest, and more too. The bonds we can buy back whenever we choose. *I* managed that, because when Judge Wendover said the bonds would be perfectly good, I said, 'If they are so good, why don't you take them yourself?' And he seemed struck with that and said he would. They didn't get much the best of me there!"

Somehow this did not seem very clear to Kate. "If he had the money to take the bonds, what was the need of any bonds at all?" she asked. "Why didn't he buy this machinery himself?"

"It wouldn't have been regular; there was some legal obstacle in the way," the mother replied. "He explained it to me, but I didn't quite catch it. At all events, there *had* to be bonds. Even *he* couldn't see any way out of *that*."

"Well, I hope it is all right," said Kate, and the conversation lapsed.

But upon reflection, in her own room, the matter seemed less and less all right, and finally, after a long and not very helpful consultation with her sister, Kate suddenly thought of Reuben Tracy. A second later she had fully decided to ask his advice, and swift upon this rose the resolve to summon him immediately.

Thus it was that the perfumed note came to be sent.

Reuben took the seat in the drawing-room of the Minsters indicated by the servant who had admitted him, and it did not occur to this member of the firm of Tracy & Boyce to walk about and look at the pictures, much less to wonder how many of them were of young men.

Even in this dull light he could recognize, on the opposite wall, a boyhood portrait of the Stephen Minster, Junior, whose early death had dashed so many hopes, and pointed so many morals to the profit of godly villagers. He thought about this worthless, brief career, as his eyes rested on the bright, boyish face of the portrait, with the clear dark eyes and the fresh-tinted cheeks, and his serious mind filled itself with protests against the conditions which had made of this heir to millions a rake and a fool. There was no visible reason why Stephen Minster's son should not have been clever and strong, a fit master of the great part created

for him by his father. There must be some blight, some mysterious curse upon hereditary riches here in America, thought Reuben, for all at once he found himself persuaded that this was the rule with most rich men's sons. Therein lay a terrible menace to the Republic, he said to himself. Vague musings upon the possibility of remedying this were beginning to float in his brain—the man could never contemplate injustices, great or small, without longing to set them right—when the door opened and the tall young elder daughter of the Minsters entered.

Reuben rose and felt himself making some such obeisance before her in spirit as one lays at the feet of a queen. What he did in reality or what he said, left no record on his memory.

He had been seated again for some minutes, and had listened with the professional side of his mind to most of what story she had to tell, before he regained control of his perceptions and began to realize that the most beautiful woman he had ever seen was confiding to him her anxieties, as a friend even more than as a lawyer. The situation was so wonderful that it needed all the control he had over his faculties to grasp and hold it. Always afterward he thought of the moment in which his confusion of mind vanished, and he, sitting on the sofa facing her chair, was able to lean back a little and talk as if he had known her a long time, as the turning-point in his whole life.

What it was in her power to tell him about the transaction which had frightened her did not convey

a very clear idea to his mind. A mortgage of four hundred thousand dollars had been placed upon the Minsters' property to meet the alleged necessities of a company in which they were large owners, and their own furnaces had been put under the control of a big trust formed by other manufacturers, presumably for the benefit of all its members. This was what he made out of her story.

"On their face," he said, "these things seem regular enough. The doubtful point, of course, would be whether, in both transactions, your interests and those of your family were perfectly safe-guarded. This is something I can form no opinion about. But Mr. Boyce must have looked out for that and seen that you got 'value received.'"

"Ah, Mr. Boyce! That is just the question," Kate answered, swiftly. "*Has* he looked out for it?"

"Curiously enough he has never spoken with me, even indirectly, about having taken charge of your mother's business," replied Reuben, slowly. "But he is a competent man, with a considerable talent for detail, and a good knowledge of business, as well as of legal forms. I should say you might be perfectly easy about his capacity to guard your interests; oh, yes, entirely easy."

"It isn't his capacity that I was thinking about," said the young woman, hesitatingly. "I wanted to ask you about him himself—about the *man*."

Reuben smiled in an involuntary effort to conceal his uneasiness. "They say that no man is a hero

to his valet, you know," he made answer. "In the same way business men ought not to be cross-examined on the opinions which the community at large may have concerning their partners. Boyce and I occupy, in a remote kind of way, the relations of husband and wife. We maintain a public attitude toward each other of great respect and admiration, and are bound to do so by the same rules which govern the heads of a family. And we mustn't talk about each other. You never would go to one of a married couple for an opinion about the other. If the opinion were all praise, you would set it down to prejudice; if it were censure, the fact of its source would shock you. Oh, no, partners mustn't discuss each other. That would be letting all the bars down with a vengeance."

He had said all this with an effort at lightness, and ended, as he had begun, with a smile. Kate, looking intently into his face, did not smile in response. He thought her expression was one of disappointment.

"Perhaps I was wrong to ask you," she answered, after a little pause, and in a colder tone. "You men do stand by each other so splendidly. It is the secret of your strength. It is why your sex possesses the earth, and the fulness thereof."

It was easier for Reuben to smile naturally this time. "But I illustrated my position by an example of a still finer reticence," he said; "the finest one can imagine—that of husband and wife."

"You are not married, I believe, Mr. Tracy," was her comment, and its edge was apparent.

"No," he said, and stopped short. No other words came to his tongue, and his thoughts seemed to have gone away into somebody else's mind, leaving only a formless blank, over which hung, like a canopy of cloud, a depressing uneasiness lest his visit should not, after all, turn out a success.

"Then you think I have needlessly worried myself," she was saying when he came back into mental life again.

"Not altogether that, either," he replied, moving in his seat, and sitting upright like a man who has shaken himself out of a disposition to doze. "So far as you have described them, the transactions may easily be all right. Everything depends upon details which you cannot give. The sum seems a large one to raise for the purchase of machinery, and it might be well to inquire into the exact nature and validity of the purchase. As for the terms upon which you lend the money to the company, of course Mr. Boyce has secured those. In the matter of the trust, I cannot speak at all. The idea is hateful to me, personally. All such combinations excite my anger. But as a business operation it may improve your property; always assuming that you are capably and fairly represented in the control of the trust. I suppose Mr. Boyce has attended to that."

"But don't you see," broke in the girl, "it is all Mr. Boyce! It is to be assumed that he will do this, to be taken for granted he will do that, to be hoped that he has done the other. *That* is what I

am anxious about. *Has* he done these things? *Will* he do them?"

"And that, of course, is what I cannot tell you," said Reuben. "How can I know?"

"But you can find out."

The lawyer knitted his ordinarily placid brows for a moment in thought. Then he slowly shook his head. "I am afraid not," he said, slowly. "I should be very angry if the railroad people, for example, set him to examining what I had done for them; angry with him, especially, for accepting such a commission."

"I am sorry, Mr. Tracy, if I seem to have proposed anything dishonorable to you," Miss Kate responded, with added formality in voice and manner. "I did not mean to."

"How could I imagine such a thing?" said Reuben, more readily than was his wont. "I only sought to make a peculiar situation clear to you, who are not familiar with such things. If I asked him questions, or meddled in the matter at all, he would resent it; and by usage he would be justified in resenting it. That is how it stands."

"Then you cannot help me, after all!" She spoke despondingly now, with the low, rich vibration in her tone which Reuben had dwelt so often on in memory since he first heard it. "And I had counted so much upon your aid," she added, with a sigh.

"I would do a great deal to be of use to you," the young man said, earnestly, and looked her in the face

with calm frankness ; " a great deal, Miss Minster, but—"

" Yes, but that 'but' means everything. I repeat, in this situation you can do nothing."

" I cannot take a brief against my partner."

" I should not suggest that again, Mr. Tracy," she interposed. " I can see that I was wrong there, and you were right."

" Don't put it in that way. There was no question of wrong or right. I merely pointed out a condition of business relations which had not occurred to you."

" And there is no other way? "

Another way had dawned on Reuben's mind, but it was so bold and precipitous that he hesitated to consider it seriously at first. When it did take form and force itself upon him, he said, half quaking at his own audacity :

" No other way—while—he remains my partner."

Bright women discover many obscure things by the use of that marvellous faculty we call intuition, but they have by no means reduced its employment to an exact science. Sometimes their failure to discover more obvious things is equally remarkable. At this moment, for example, Kate's feminine wits did not in the least help her to read the mind of the man before her, or the meaning in his words. In truth, they misled her, for she heard only an obstinate reiteration of an unpleasant statement, and set her teeth together with impatience as she heard it.

And had she even kept these teeth tight clinched, and said nothing, the man might have gone on in self-explanation, and made clear to her her mistake. But her vexation was too imperative for silence.

"I am very sorry to have taken up your time, Mr. Tracy," she said, stiffly, and rose from her chair. "I am so little informed about these matters, I really imagined you could help us. Pray forgive me."

If Reuben could have realized, as he stood in momentary embarrassment, that this beautiful lady before him had fairly bitten her tongue to restrain it from adding that he might treat this as a professional call, or in some other way suggesting that he would be paid for his time, he might have been more embarrassed still, and angry as well.

But it did not occur to him to feel annoyance—at least, toward her. He really was sorry that no way of being of help to her seemed immediately available, and he thought of this more in fact than he did of the personal aspects of his failure to justify her invitation. He noted that the faint perfume which her dress exhaled as she rose was identical with that of the letter of invitation, and thought to himself that he would preserve that letter, and then that it would not be quite warranted by the circumstances, and so found himself standing silent before her, sorely reluctant to go away, and conscious that there must be a sympathetic light in his eyes which hers did not reflect.

"I am truly grieved if you are disappointed," he managed to say at last.

"Oh, it is nothing, Mr. Tracy," she said, politely, and moved toward the door. "It was my ignorance of business rules. I am so sorry to have troubled you."

Reuben followed her through the hall to the outer door, wondering if she would offer to shake hands with him, and putting both his stick and hat in his left hand to free the other in case she did.

On the doorstep she did give him her hand, and in that moment, ruled by a flash of impulse, he heard himself saying to her:

"If anything happens, if you learn anything, if you need me, you *won't* fail to call me, will you?"

Then the door closed, and as Reuben walked away he did not seem able to recall whether she had answered his appeal or not. In sober fact, it had scarcely sounded like his appeal at all. The voice was certainly one which had never been heard in the law-office down on Main Street or in the trial-chamber of the Dearborn County Court-House over the way. It had sounded more like the voice of an actor in the theatre—like a Romeo murmuring up to the sweet girl in the balcony.

Reuben walked straight to his office, and straight through to the little inner apartment appropriated to his private uses. There were some people in the large room talking with his partner, but he scarcely observed their presence as he passed. He unlocked a tiny drawer in the top of his desk, cleared out its contents brusquely, dusted the inside with his hand-

kerchief, and then placed within it a perfumed note which he took from his pocket.

When he had turned the key upon this souvenir, he drew a long breath, lighted a cigar, and sat down, with his feet on the table and his thoughts among the stars.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SAY THAT THERE IS NO ANSWER."

REUBEN allowed his mind to drift at will in this novel, enchanted channel for a long time, until the clients outside had taken their departure, and his cigar had burned out, and his partner had sauntered in to mark by some casual talk the fact that the day was done.

What this mind shaped into dreams and desires and pictures in its musings, it would not be an easy matter to detail. The sum of the reverie—or, rather, the central goal up to which every differing train of thought somehow managed to lead him—was that Kate Minster was the most beautiful, the cleverest, the dearest, the loveliest, the most to be adored and longed for, of all mortal women.

If he did not say to himself, in so many words, "I love her," it was because the phraseology was unfamiliar to him. That eternal triplet of tender verb and soulful pronouns, which sings itself in our more accustomed hearts to music set by the stress of our present senses—now the gay carol of spring-time, sure and confident ; now the soft twilight song, wherein the very weariness of bliss sighs forth a blessing ; now the vibrant, wooing ballad of a graver passion, with tears close underlying rapture ; now,

alas! the dirge of hopeless loss, with wailing chords which overwhelm like curses, smitten upon heart-strings strained to the breaking—these three little words did not occur to him. But no lover self-confessed could have dreamed more deliciously.

He had spoken with her twice now—once when she was wrapped in furs and wore a bonnet, and once in her own house, where she was dressed in a creamy white gown, with a cord and tassels about the waist. These details were tangible possessions in the treasure-house of his memory. The first time she had charmed and gratified his vague notions of what a beautiful and generous woman should be; he had been unspeakably pleased by the enthusiasm with which she threw herself into the plan for helping the poor work-girls of the town. On this second occasion she had been concerned only about the safety of her own money, and that of her family, and yet his liking for her had flared up into something very like a consuming flame. If there was a paradox here, the lawyer did not see it.

There floated across his mind now and again stray black motes of recollection that she had not seemed altogether pleased with him on this later occasion, but they passed away without staining the bright colors of his meditation. It did not matter what she had thought or said. The fact of his having been there with her, the existence of that little perfumed letter tenderly locked up in the desk before him, the breathing, smiling, dark-eyed picture of her which glowed in his brain—these were enough.

Once before—once only in his life—the personality of a woman had seized command of his thoughts. Years ago, when he was still the school-teacher at the Burfield, he had felt himself in love with Annie Fairchild, surely the sweetest flower that all the farm-lands of Dearborn had ever produced. He had come very near revealing his heart—doubtless the girl did know well enough of his devotion—but she was in love with her cousin Seth, and Reuben had come to realize this, and so had never spoken, but had gone away to New York instead.

He could remember that for a time he was unhappy, and even so late as last autumn, after nearly four years had gone by, the mere thought that she commended her protégée, Jessica Lawton, to his kindness, had thrilled him with something of the old feeling. But now she seemed all at once to have faded away into indistinct remoteness, like the figure of some little girl he had known in his boyhood and had never seen since.

Curiously enough, the apparition of Jessica Lawton rose and took form in his thoughts, as that of Annie Fairchild passed into the shadows of long ago. She, at least, was not a schoolgirl any more, but a full-grown woman. He could remember that the glance in her eyes when she looked at him was maturely grave and searching. She had seemed very grateful to him for calling upon her, and he liked to recall the delightful expression of surprised satisfaction which lighted up her face when she found that both Miss Minster and he would help her.

Miss Minster and himself! They two were to work together to further and fulfil this plan of Jessica's! Oh, the charm of the thought!

Now he came to think of it, the young lady had never said a word to-day about Jessica and the plan—and, oddly enough, too, he had never once remembered it either. But then Miss Minster had other matters on her mind. She was frightened about the mortgages and the trust, and anxious to have his help to set her fears at rest.

Reuben began to wonder once more what there was really in those fears. As he pondered on this, all the latent distrust of his partner which had been growing up for weeks in his mind suddenly swelled into a great dislike. There came to him, all at once, the recollection of those mysterious and sinister words he had overheard exchanged between his partner and Tenney, and it dawned upon his slow-working consciousness that that strange talk about "a game in his own hands" had never been explained by events. Then, in an instant, he realized instinctively that here *was* the game.

It was at this juncture that Horace strolled into the presence of his partner. He had his hands in his trousers pockets, and a cigar between his teeth. This latter he now proceeded to light.

"Ferguson has been here again," he said, nonchalantly, "and brought his brother with him. He can't make up his mind whether to appeal the case or not. He'd like to try it, but the expense scares him. I told him at last that I was tired of

hearing about the thing, and didn't give a damn what he did, as long as he only shut up and gave me a rest."

Reuben did not feel interested in the Fergusons. He looked his partner keenly, almost sternly, in the eye, and said:

"You have never mentioned to me that Mrs. Minster had put her business in your hands."

Horace flushed a little, and returned the other's gaze with one equally truculent.

"It didn't seem to be necessary," he replied, curtly. "It is private business."

"Nothing was said about your having private business when the firm was established," commented Reuben.

"That may be," retorted Horace. "But you have your railroad affairs—a purely personal matter. Why shouldn't I have an equal right?"

"I don't say you haven't. What I am thinking of is your secrecy in the matter. I hate to have people act in that way, as if I couldn't be trusted."

Horace had never heard Reuben speak in this tone before. The whole Minster business had perplexed and harassed him into a state of nervous irritability these last few weeks, and it was easy for him now to snap at provocation.

"At least *I* may be trusted to mind my own affairs," he said, with cutting niceness of enunciation and a lowering scowl of the brows.

There came a little pause, for Reuben saw himself face to face with a quarrel, and shrank from precipi-

tating it needlessly. Perhaps the rupture would be necessary, but he would do nothing to hasten it out of mere ill-temper.

"That isn't the point," he said at last, looking up with more calmness into the other's face. "I simply commented on your having taken such pains to keep the whole thing from me. Why on earth should you have thought that essential?"

Horace answered with a question. "Who told you about it?" he asked, in a surly tone.

"Old 'Squire Gedney mentioned it first. Others have spoken of it since."

"Well, what am I to understand? Do you intend to object to my keeping the business? I may tell you that it was by the special request of my clients that I undertook it alone, and, as they laid so much stress on that, it seemed to me best not to speak of it at all to you."

"Why?"

"To be frank," said Horace, with a cold gleam in his eye, "I didn't imagine that it would be particularly pleasant to you to learn that the Minster ladies desired not to have you associated with their affairs. It seemed one of those things best left unsaid. However, you have it now."

Reuben felt the disagreeable intention of his partner's words even more than he did their bearing upon the dreams from which he had been awakened. He had by this time perfectly made up his mind about Horace, and realized that a break-up was inevitable. The conviction that this young man was

dishonest carried with it, however, the suggestion that it would be wise to probe him and try to learn what he was at.

"I wish you would sit down a minute or two," he said. "I want to talk to you."

Horace took a chair, and turned the cigar restlessly around in his teeth. He was conscious that his nerves were not quite what they should be.

"It seems to me," pursued Reuben—"I'm speaking as an older lawyer than you, and an older man—it seems to me that to put a four hundred thousand dollar mortgage on the Minster property is a pretty big undertaking for a young man to go into on his own hook, without consulting anybody. Don't misunderstand me. Don't think I wish to meddle. Only it seems to me, if I had been in your place, I should have moved very cautiously and taken advice."

"I did take advice," said Horace. The discovery that Reuben knew of this mortgage filled him with uneasiness.

"Of whom? Schuyler Tenney?" asked Reuben, speaking calmly enough, but watching with all his eyes.

The chance shot went straight to the mark. Horace visibly flushed, and then turned pale.

"I decline to be catechised in this way," he said, nervously shifting his position on the chair, and then suddenly rising. "Gedney is a damned, meddlesome, drunken old fool," he added, with irrelevant vehemence.

"Yes, I'm afraid 'Cal' does drink too much," answered Reuben, with perfect amiability of tone. He evinced no desire to continue the conversation, and Horace, after standing for an uncertain moment or two in the doorway, went out and put on his overcoat. Then he came back again.

"Am I to take it that you object to my continuing to act as attorney for these ladies?" he asked from the threshold of the outer room, his voice shaking a little in spite of itself.

"I don't think I have said that," replied Reuben.

"No, you haven't *said* it," commented the other.

"To tell the truth, I haven't quite cleared up in my own mind just what I do object to, or how much," said Reuben, relighting his cigar, and contemplating his boots crossed on the desk-top. "We'll talk of this again."

"As you like," muttered young Mr. Boyce. Then he turned, and went away without saying good-night. The outer door slammed behind him.

Twilight began to close in upon the winter's day, but Reuben still sat in meditation. He had parted with his colleague in anger, and it was evident enough that the office family was to be broken up; but he gave scarcely a thought to these things. His mind, in fact, seemed by preference to dwell chiefly upon the large twisted silken cord which girdled the waist of that wonderful young woman, and the tasselled ends of which hung against the white front of her gown like the beads of a nun. Many variant thoughts about her affairs, about her future, rose in

his mind and pleasantly excited it, but they all in turn merged vaguely into fancies circling around that glossy rope and weaving themselves into its strands.

It was very near tea-time, and darkness had established itself for the night in the offices, before Reuben's vagrant musings prompted him to action. Upon the spur of the moment, he all at once put down his feet, lighted the gas over his desk, took out the perfumed letter from its consecrated resting-place, and began hurriedly to write a reply to it. He had suddenly realized that the memorable interview that afternoon had been, from her point of view, inconclusive.

Five times he worked his way down nearly to the bottom of the page, and then tore up the sheet. At first he was too expansive; then the contrasted fault of over-reticence jarred upon him. At last he constructed this letter, which obtained a reluctant approval from his critical sense, though it seemed to his heart a pitifully gagged and blindfolded mis-sive:

DEAR MISS MINSTER: Unfortunately, I was unable this afternoon to see my way to helping you upon the lines which you suggested. I am afraid that this disappointed you.

Matters have assumed a somewhat different aspect since our talk. By the time that you have mastered the details of what you had on your mind, I may be in a position to consult with you freely upon the whole subject.

I want you to believe that I am very anxious to be of assistance to you, in this as in all other things.

Faithfully yours,

REUBEN TRACY.

Reuben locked up the keepsake note again, fondly entertaining the idea as he did so that soon there might be others to bear it company. Then he closed the offices, went down upon the street, and told the first idle boy he met that he could earn fifty cents by carrying a letter at once to the home of the Minsters. The money would be his when he returned to the Dearborn House.

"Will there be any answer?" asked the boy.

This opened up a new idea to the lawyer. "You might wait and see," he said.

But the messenger came back in a depressingly short space of time, with the word that no answer was required.

He had hurried both ways with a stern concentration of purpose, and now he dashed off once more in an even more strenuous race against time, with the half-dollar clutched securely inside his mitten. The Great Occidental Minstrel Combination was in town, and the boy leaped over snowbanks, and slid furiously across slippery places, in the earnestness of his intention not to miss one single joke.

The big man whom he left went wearily up the stairs to his room, and walked therein for aimless hours, and almost scowled as he shook his head at the waitress who came up to remind him that he had had no supper.

The two Minster sisters had read Reuben's note together, in the seclusion of their own sitting-room. They had previously discussed the fact of his refusal

to assist them—for so it translated itself in Kate's account of the interview—and had viewed it with almost displeasure.

Ethel was, however, disposed to relent when the letter came.

"At least it might be well to write him a polite note," she said, "thanking him, and saying that circumstances might arise under which you would be glad to—to avail yourself, and so on."

"I don't think I shall write at all," Kate replied, glancing over the lawyer's missive again. "He took no interest in the thing whatever. And you see how even now he infers that 'the lines I suggested' were dishonorable."

"I didn't see that, Kate."

"Here it is. 'He was unable to see his way,' and that sort of thing. And he *said* himself that the business all seemed regular enough, so far as he could see.—Say that there is no answer," she added to the maid at the door.

The two girls sat in silence for a moment in the soft, cosy light between the fire-place and the lace-shaded lamp. Then Ethel spoke again :

"And you really didn't like him, Kate? You know you were so enthusiastic about him, that day you came back from the milliner's shop. I never heard you have so much to say about any other man before."

"That was different," mused the other. Her voice grew even less kindly, and the words came swifter as she went on. "*Then* it was a question of

helping the Lawton girl. He was quite excited about *that*. He didn't hum and haw, and talk about 'the lines suggested' to him, then. He could 'see his way' very clearly indeed. Oh, yes, with entire clearness! And I was childish enough to be taken in by it all. I am vexed with myself when I think of it."

"Are you sure you are being quite fair, Kate?" pale Ethel asked, putting her hand caressingly on the sister's knee. "Read the letter again, dear. He *says* he wants to help you; and he hints, too, that something has happened, or is going to happen, to make him free in the matter. How can we tell what that something is, or how he felt himself bound before? It seems to me that we oughtn't to leap at the idea of his being unfriendly. I am sure that you believed him to be a wholly good man before. Why assume all at once now that he is not, just because— Men don't change from good to bad like that."

"Ah, but *was* he good before, or did we only think so?"

Ethel went on: "Surely, he knows more about business than we do. And if he was unable to help you, it must have been for some real reason."

"That is *it*! I should like to be helped first, and let reasons come afterward." The girl's dark eyes flashed with an imperious light. "What kind of a hero is it who, when you cry for assistance, calmly says: 'Upon the lines you suggest I do not see my

way'? It is high time the books about chivalry were burned, if *that* is the modern man."

"But you did not cry to a hero for assistance. You merely asked the advice of a lawyer about a mortgage—if mamma is right about its being a mortgage."

"It is the same thing," said Kate, pushing the hassock impatiently with her foot. "Whether the distressed maiden falls into the water or into debt, the principle is precisely the same."

"He couldn't do what you asked, because it would be unfair to his partner. Now, isn't that it exactly? And wasn't that honorable? Now, *be* frank, Kate."

"The partner would have gone into anything headlong, asking no questions, raising no objections, if I had so much as lifted my finger. He never would have given *his* partner a thought."

Kate confided this answer to the firelight. She was conscious of a desire just now not to meet her sister's glance.

"And you like the man without scruples better than the man with them?"

"At least, he is more interesting," the elder girl said, still with her eyes on the burning logs.

Ethel waited a little for some additional hint as to her sister's state of mind. When the silence had begun to make itself felt, she said:

"Kate Minster, you don't mean one word of what you are saying."

"Ah, but I do."

"No; listen to me. You really in your heart respect Mr. Tracy very much for his action to-day."

"For being so much less eager to help me than he was to help the milliner?"

"No; for not being willing to help even you by doing an unfair thing."

"Well—if you like—respect, yes. But so one respects John Knox, and Increase Mather, and St. Simon What's-his-name on top of the pillar—all the disagreeable people, in fact. But it isn't respect that makes the world go round. There is such a thing as caring too much for respect, and too little for warmth of feeling, and generous impulses, and— and so on."

"You're a queer girl, Kate," was all Ethel could think to say.

This time the silence maintained itself so long that the snapping of sparks on the hearth, and even the rushing suction of air in the lamp-flame, grew to be obvious noises. At last Ethel slid softly from the couch to the carpet, and nestled her head against her sister's waist. Kate put her arm tenderly over the girl's shoulder, and drew her closer to her, and the silence had become vocal with affectionate murmurings to them both. It was the younger sister who finally spoke:

"You *won't* do anything rash, Kate? Nothing without talking it over with me?" she pleaded, almost sadly.

Kate bent over and kissed her twice, thrice, on the forehead, and stroked the silken hair upon this

forehead caressingly. Her own eyes glistened with the beginnings of tears before she made answer, rising as she spoke, and striving to import into her voice the accent of gayety:

“As if I ever dreamed of doing anything at all without asking you! And please, puss, may I go **to** bed now?”

CHAPTER XXIII.

HORACE'S PATH BECOMES TORTUOUS.

"TRACY has found out that I'm doing the Minister business, and he's cut up rough about it. I shouldn't be surprised if the firm came a cropper over the thing."

Horace Boyce confided this information to Mr. Schuyler Tenney on the forenoon following his scene with Reuben, and though the language in which it was couched was in part unfamiliar, the hardware merchant had no difficulty in grasping its meaning. He stopped his task of going through the morning's batch of business letters, and looked up keenly at the young man.

"Found out—how do you mean? I told you to tell him—told you the day you came here to talk about the General's affairs."

"Well, I didn't tell him."

"And why?" Tenney demanded, sharply. "I should like to know why?"

"Because it didn't suit me to do so," replied the young man; "just as it doesn't suit me now to be bullied about it."

Mr. Tenney looked for just a fleeting instant as if

he were going to respond in kind. Then he thought better of it, and began toying with one of the envelopes before him.

"You must have got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning," he said, smilingly. "Why, man alive, nobody dreamed of bullying you. Only, of course, it would have been better if you'd told Tracy. And you say he is mad about it?"

"Yes, he was deucedly offensive. I daresay it will come to an open row. I haven't seen him yet to-day, but things looked very dickey indeed for the partnership last night."

"Then the firm hasn't got any specified term to run?"

"No; it is terminable at pleasure of both parties, which of course means either party."

"Well, then, you can tell him to go to the old Harry, if you like."

"Precisely what I mean to do—if—"

"If what?"

"If there is going to be enough in this Minster business to keep me going in the mean while. I don't think I could take much of his regular office business away. I haven't been there long enough, you know."

"Enough? I should think there *would* be enough! You will have five thousand dollars as her representative in the Thessaly Manufacturing Company. I daresay you might charge something for acting as her agent in the pig-iron trust, too, though I'd draw it pretty mild if I were you. Women get

scared at bills for that sort of thing. A young fellow like you ought to save money on half of five thousand dollars. It never cost me fifteen hundred dollars yet to live, and live well, too."

Horace smiled in turn, and the smile was felt by both to suffice without words. There was no need to express in terms the fact that in matters of necessary expense a Boyce and a Tenney were two widely differentiated persons. Only perhaps Horace had more satisfaction out of the thought than did his companion.

"Oh, by the way," he added, "I ought to tell you, Tracy knows in some way that you are mixed up with me in the thing. He mentioned your name—in that slow, ox-like way of his, so that I couldn't tell how much he knew or suspected."

Mr. Tenney was interested in this, and showed his concern by separating the letters on his desk into little piles, as if he were preparing to perform a card trick.

"I guess it won't matter much," he said at last. "Everybody's going to know it pretty soon, now." He thought again for a little, and then added: "Only, on second thought, you'd better stick in with him a while longer, if you can. Make some sort of apology to him, if he needs one, and keep in the firm. It will be better so."

"Why should I, pray?" demanded the young man, curtly.

Mr. Tenney again looked momentarily as if he were tempted to reply with acerbity, and again the

look vanished as swiftly as it came. He answered in all mildness :

"Because I don't want Tracy to be sniffing around, inquiring into things, until we are fairly in the saddle. He might spoil everything."

"But how will my remaining with him prevent that?"

"You don't know your man," replied Tenney. "He's one of those fellows who would feel in honor bound to keep his hands off, simply because you *were* with him. That's the beauty of that kind of chap."

This tribute to the moral value of his partner impressed Horace but faintly. "Well, I'll see how he talks to-day," he said, doubtfully. "Perhaps we can manage to hit it off together a while longer." Then a thought crossed his mind, and he asked with abruptness :

"What are you afraid of his finding out, if he does 'sniff around' as you call it? What is there to find out? Everything is above board, isn't it?"

"Why, you know it is. Who should know it better than you?" Mr. Tenney responded.

Horace reasoned to himself as he walked away that there really was no cause for apprehension. Tenney was smart, and evidently Wendover was smart too, but if they tried to pull the wool over his eyes they would find that he himself had not been born yesterday. He had done everything they had suggested to him, but he felt that the independent and even captious manner in which he had done it all

must have shown the schemers that he was not a man to be trifled with. Thus far he could see no dishonesty in their plans. He had been very nervous about the first steps, but his mind was almost easy now. He was in a position where he could protect the Minsters if any harm threatened them. And very soon now, he said confidently to himself, he would be in an even more enviable position—that of a member of the family council, a prospective son-in-law. It was clear to his perceptions that Kate liked him, and that he had no rivals.

It happened that Reuben did not refer again to the subject of yesterday's dispute, and while Horace acquiesced in the silence, he was conscious of some disappointment over it. It annoyed him to even look at his partner this morning, and he was sick and tired of the partnership. It required an effort to be passing civil with Reuben, and he said to himself a hundred times during the day that he should be heartily glad when the Thessaly Manufacturing Company got its new machinery in, and began real operations, so that he could take up his position there as the visible agent of the millions, and pitch his partner and the pettifogging law business overboard altogether.

In the course of the afternoon he went to the residence of the Minsters. The day was not Tuesday, but Horace regarded himself as emancipated from formal conditions, and at the door asked for the ladies, and then made his own way into the drawing-room, with entire self-possession.

When Mrs. Minster came down, he had some trivial matter of business ready as a pretext for his visit, but her manner was so gracious that he felt pleasantly conscious of the futility of pretexts. He was on such a footing in the Minster household that he would never need excuses any more.

The lady herself mentioned the plan of his attending the forthcoming meeting of the directors of the pig-iron trust at Pittsburg, and told him that she had instructed her bankers to deposit with his bankers a lump sum for expenses chargeable against the estate, which he could use at discretion. "You mustn't be asked to use your own money on our business," she said, smilingly.

It is only natural to warm toward people who have such nice things as this to say, and Horace found himself assuming a very confidential, almost filial, attitude toward Mrs. Minster. Her kindness to him was so marked that he felt really moved by it, and in a gracefully indirect way said so. He managed this by alluding to his own mother, who had died when he was a little boy, and then dwelling, with a tender inflection in his voice, upon the painful loneliness which young men feel who are brought up in motherless homes. "It seems as if I had never known a home at all," he said, and sighed.

"She was one of the Beekmans from Tyre, wasn't she? I've heard Tabitha speak of her often," said Mrs. Minster. The words were not important, but the look which accompanied them was distinctly sympathetic.

Perhaps it was this glance that affected Horace. He made a little gulping sound in his throat, clinched his hands together, and looked fixedly down upon the pattern of the carpet.

"We should both have been better men if she had lived," he murmured, in a low voice.

As no answer came, he was forced to look up after a time, and then upon the instant he realized that his pathos had been wasted, for Mrs. Minster's face did not betray the emotion he had anticipated. She seemed to have been thinking of something else.

"Have you seen any Bermuda potatoes in the market yet?" she asked. "It's about time for them, isn't it?"

"I'll ask my father," Horace replied, determined not to be thrown off the trail. "He has been in the West Indies a good deal, and he knows all about their vegetables, and the seasons, and so on. It is about him that I wish to speak, Mrs. Minster."

The lady nodded her head, and drew down the corners of her mouth a little.

"I feel the homeless condition of the General very much," Horace went on. "The death of my mother was a terrible blow to him, one he has never recovered from."

Mrs. Minster had heard differently, but she nodded her head again in sympathy with this new view. Horace had not been mistaken in believing that filial affection was good in her eyes.

"So he has lived all these years almost alone in

the big house," the son proceeded, "and the solitary life has affected his spirits, weakened his ambition, relaxed his regard for the part he ought to play in the community. Since I have been back, he has brightened up a good deal. He has been a most loving father to me always, and I would do anything in the world to contribute to his happiness. It is borne in upon me more and more that if I had a cheerful home to which he could turn for warmth and sunshine, if I had a wife whom he could reverence and be fond of, if there were grandchildren to greet him when he came and to play upon his knee—he would feel once more as if there was something in life worth living for."

Horace awaited with deep anxiety the answer to this. The General was the worst card in his hand, one which he was glad to be rid of at any risk. If it should turn out that it had actually taken a trick in the game, then he would indeed be lucky.

"If it is no offence, how old are you, Mr. Boyce?" the lady asked.

"I shall be twenty-eight in April."

Mrs. Minster seemed to approve the figures. "I never have believed in early marriages," she said. "They make more than half the trouble there is. The Mauverensens were never great hands for marrying early. My grandfather, Major Douw, was almost thirty, and my father was past that age. And, of course, people married then much earlier than they do nowadays."

"I hope you do not think twenty-eight too

young," Horace pleaded, with alert eyes resting on her face. He paused only for an instant, and then, just as the tremor arising in his heart had reached his tongue, added earnestly, "For it is a Mauverensen I wish to marry."

Mrs. Minster looked at him with no light of comprehension in her glance. "It can't be our people," she said, composedly, "for Anthony has no daughters. It must be some of the Schenectady lot. We're not related at all. They try to make out that they are, but they're not."

"You are very closely and tenderly related to the young lady I have learned to adore," the young man said, leaning forward on his low chair until one knee almost touched the carpet. "I called her a Mauverensen because she is worthy of that historic blood, but it was her mother's, not her father's name. Mrs. Minster, I love your daughter Kate!"

"Goodness me!" was the astonished lady's comment.

She stared at the young man in suppliant attitude before her, in very considerable confusion of thought, and for what seemed to him an intolerable time.

"I am afraid it wouldn't do at all," she said first, doubtingly. Then she added, as if thinking aloud: "I might have known Kate was keeping something from me. She hasn't been herself at all these last few weeks."

"But she has not been keeping *this* from you, Mrs. Minster," urged the young man, in his softest

voice. "It is my own secret—all my own—kept locked in the inner tabernacle of my heart until this very moment, when I revealed it to you."

"You mean that Kate—my daughter—does not know of this?"

"She must know that I worship the ground she treads on—she would be blind not to realize that—but I have never said a word to her about it. No, not a word!"

Mrs. Minster uttered the little monosyllable "oh!" with a hesitating, long-drawn-out sound. It was evident that this revelation altered matters in her mind, and Horace hurried on:

"No," he said; "the relation between mother and child has always seemed to me the most sacred thing on earth—perhaps because my own mother died so many, many years ago. I would rather stifle my own feelings than let an act of mine desecrate or imperil that relation. It may be that I am old-fashioned, Mrs. Minster," the young man continued, with a deprecatory smile, "but I like the old habit of the good families—that of deferring to the parents. I say that to them the chief courtesy and deference are due. I know it is out of date, but I have always felt that way. So I speak to you first. I say to you with profound respect that you have reared the loveliest and best of all the daughters of the sons of men, and that if you will only entertain the idea of permitting me to strive to win her love, I shall be the proudest and happiest mortal on earth."

Whatever might betide with the daughter, the conquest of the mother was easy and complete.

"I like your sentiments very much indeed," she said, with evident sincerity. "And I like you too. I may as well tell you so. Of course I haven't the least idea what Kate will say."

"Oh, leave that to me!" said Horace, with ardent confidence. Then, after this rapturous outburst, he went on more quietly: "I would beg of you not to mention the subject to her. I think that would be best. Your favor has allowed me to come and go here on pleasant terms of friendship. Let these terms not be altered. I will not ask your daughter to commit herself until she has had time and chance to know me through and through. It would not be fair to her otherwise. To pick a husband is the one grand, irrevocable step in a young girl's life. Its success means bliss, content, sunshine; its failure means all that is the reverse. Therefore, I say, she cannot have too much information, too many advantages, to help her in her choice."

Thus it came to be understood that Mrs. Minster was to say nothing, and was not to seem to make more of Horace than she had previously done.

Then he bowed over her hand and lightly kissed it, in a fashion which the good lady fondly assumed to be European, and was gone.

Mrs. Minster spent the rest of the afternoon and evening in a semi-dazed abstraction of mental power, from time to time fitfully remembering some wealthy young man whom she had vaguely considered as a

possible son-in-law, and sighing impartially over each mustached and shirt-fronted figure as she pushed it out into the limbo of the might-have-been. She almost groaned once when she recalled that this secret must be kept even from her friend Tabitha.

As for Horace, he walked on air. The marvel of his great success surrounded and lifted him, as angels bear the souls of the blessed fleeing from earth in the artist's dream. The young Bonaparte, home from Italy and the reproduction of Hannibal's storied feat, with Paris on its knees before him and France resounding with his name, could not have swung his shoulders more proudly, or gazed upon unfolding destiny with a more exultant confidence.

On his way homeward an instinctive desire to be alone with his joy led him to choose unfrequented streets, and on one of these he passed a milliner's shop which he had never seen before. He would not have noted it now, save that his eye was unconsciously caught by some stray freak of color in the window where bonnets were displayed. Then, still unconsciously, his vision embraced the glass door beside this window, and there suddenly it was arrested and turned to a bewildered stare.

In the dusk of the little shop nothing could be distinguished but two figures which stood close by the door. The dying light from the western sky, ruddily brilliant and penetrating in its final glow, fell full upon the faces of these two as they were framed in profile by the door.

One was the face of Kate Minster, the woman he was to wed. The other was the face of Jessica Lawton, the woman whose life he had despoiled.

Horace realized nothing else so swiftly as that he had not been seen, and, with an instinctive lowering of the head and a quickened step, he passed on. It was not until he had got out of the street altogether that he breathed a long breath and was able to think. Then he found himself trembling with excitement, as if he had been through a battle or a burning house.

Reflection soon helped his nerves to quietude again. Evidently the girl had opened a millinery shop, and evidently Miss Minster was buying a bonnet of her. That was all there was of it, and surely there was no earthly cause for perturbation in that. The young man had thought so lightly of the Lawton incident at Thanksgiving time that it had never since occurred to him to ask Tracy about its sequel. It came to his mind now that Tracy had probably helped her to start the shop. "Damn Tracy!" he said to himself.

No, there was nothing to be uneasy about in the casual, commercial meeting of these two women. He became quite clear on this point as he strode along toward home. At his next meeting with Kate it might do no harm to mention having seen her there in passing, and to drop a hint as to the character of the girl whom she was dealing with. He would see how the talk shaped itself, after the Lawton woman's name had been mentioned. It was a

great nuisance, her coming to Thessaly, anyway. He didn't wish her any special harm, but if she got in his way here she should be crushed like an insect. But, pshaw! it was silly to conceive injury or embarrassment coming from her.

So with a laugh he dismissed the subject from his thoughts, and went home to dine with his father, and gladdened the General's heart by a more or less elaborated account of the day's momentous event, in complete forgetfulness of the shock he had had.

In the dead of the night, however, he did think of it again with a vengeance. He awoke screaming, and cold with frightened quakings, under the spell of some hideous nightmare. When he thought upon them, the terrors of his dream were purely fantastic and could not be shaped into any kind of coherent form. But the profile of the Lawton girl seemed to be a part of all these terrors, a twisted and elongated side-face, with staring, empty eyes and lips down-drawn like those of the Medusa's head, and yet, strangely enough, with a certain shifting effect of beauty upon it all under the warm light of a winter sunset.

Horace lay a long time awake, deliberately striving to exorcise this repellent countenance by fixing his thoughts upon the other face—the strong, beautiful, queenly face of the girl who was to be his wife. But he could not bring up before his mind's eye this picture that he wanted, and he could not drive the other away.

Sleep came again somehow, and there were no

more bad dreams to be remembered. In the morning Horace did not even recall very distinctly the episode of the nightmare, but he discovered some novel threads of gray at his temple as he brushed his hair, and for the first time in his life, too, he took a drink of spirits before breakfast.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VEHEMENT RESOLVE.

THE sloppy snow went away at last, and the reluctant frost was forced to follow, yet not before it had wreaked its spite by softening all the country roads into dismal swamps of mud, and heaving into painful confusion of holes and hummocks the pavements on Thessaly's main streets. But in compensation the birds came back, and the crocus and hyacinth showed themselves, and buds warmed to life again along the tender silk-brown boughs and melted into the pale bright green of a spring's new foliage. Overcoats disappeared, and bare-legged boys with poles and strings of fish dawned upon the vision. The air was laden with the perfume of lilacs and talk about base-ball.

From this to midsummer seemed but a step. The factory workmen walked more wearily up the hill in the heat to their noonday dinners ; lager-beer kegs advanced all at once to be the chief staple of freight traffic at the railway dépôt. People who could afford to take travelling vacations began to make their plans or to fulfil them, and those who could not began musing pleasantly upon the charms of hop-picking in September. And then, lo ! it was

autumn, and young men added with pride another unit to the sum of their age, and their mothers and sisters secretly subtracted such groups or fractions of units as were needful, and felt no more compunction at thus hoodwinking Time than if he had been a customs-officer.

The village of Thessaly, which like a horizon encompassed most of the individuals whom we know, could tell little more than this of the months that had passed since Thanksgiving Day, now once again the holiday closest at hand. The seasons of rest and open-air amusement lay behind it, and in front was a vista made of toil. There had been many deaths, and still more numerous births, and none in either class mattered much save under the roof-tree actually blessed or afflicted. The year had been fairly prosperous, and the legislature had passed the bill which at New Year's would enable the village to call itself a city.

Of the people with whom this story is concerned, there is scarcely more to record during this lapse of time.

Jessica Lawton was perhaps the one most conscious of change. At the very beginning of spring, indeed on the very day when Horace had his momentary fright in passing the shop, Miss Minster had visited her, had brought a reasonably comprehensive plan for the Girls' Resting House, as she wanted it called, and had given her a considerable sum of money to carry out this plan. For a long time it puzzled Jessica a good deal that Miss Minster never

came again. The scheme took on tangible form; some score of work-girls availed themselves of its privileges, and the result thus far involved less friction and more substantial success than Jessica had dared to expect. It seemed passing strange that Miss Minster, who had been so deeply enthusiastic at first, should never have cared to come and see the enterprise, now that it was in working order. Once or twice Miss Tabitha had dropped in, and professed to be greatly pleased with everything, but even in her manner there was an indefinable alteration which forbade questions about the younger lady.

There were rumors about in the town which might have helped Jessica to an explanation had they reached her. The village gossips did not fail to note that the Minster family made a much longer sojourn this year at Newport, and then at Brick Church, New Jersey, than they had ever done before; and gradually the intelligence sifted about that young Horace Boyce had spent a considerable portion of his summer vacation with them. Thessaly could put two and two together as well as any other community. The understanding little by little spread its way that Horace was going to marry into the Minster millions.

If there were repinings over this foreseen event, they were carefully dissembled. People who knew the young man liked him well enough. His professional record was good, and he had made a speech on the Fourth of July which pleased everybody except 'Squire Gedney; but then, the spiteful old "Cal"

never liked anybody's speeches save his own. Even more satisfaction was felt, however, on the score of the General. His son was a showy young fellow, smart and well-dressed, no doubt, but perhaps a trifle too much given to patronizing folks who had not been to Europe, and did not scrub themselves all over with cold water, and put on a clean shirt with both collar and cuffs attached, every morning. But for the General there was a genuine affection. It pleased Thessaly to note that, since he had begun to visit at the home of the Minsters, other signs of social rehabilitation had followed, and that he himself drank less and led a more orderly life than of yore. When his intimates jokingly congratulated him on the rumors of his son's good fortune, the General tacitly gave them confirmation by his smile.

If Jessica had heard these reports, she might have traced at once to its source Miss Minster's sudden and inexplicable coolness. Not hearing them, she felt grieved and perplexed for a time, and then schooled herself into resignation as she recalled Reuben Tracy's warning about the way rich people took up whims and dropped them again, just as fancy dictated.

It was on the first day of November that the popular rumor as to Horace's prospects reached her, and this was a day memorable for vastly more important occurrences in the history of industrial Thessaly.

The return of cold weather had been marked, among other signs of the season, by a renewed dis-

position on the part of Ben Lawton to drop in to the millinery shop, and sit around by the fire in the inner room. Ben came this day somewhat earlier than usual—the midday meal was in its preliminary stages of preparation under Lucinda's red hands—and it was immediately evident that he was more excited over something that had happened outside than by his expectation of getting a dinner.

"There's the very old Nick to pay down in the village!" he said, as he put his feet on the stove-hearth. "Heard about it, any of you?"

Ben had scarcely ascended in the social scale during the scant year that had passed, though the general average of whiteness in his paper collars had somewhat risen, and his hair and straggling dry-mud-colored beard were kept more duly under the subjection of shears. His clothes, too, were whole and unworn, but they hung upon his slouching and round-shouldered figure with "poor white" written in every misfitting fold and on every bagging projection. Jessica had resigned all hope that he would ever be anything but a canal boatman in mien or ambition, but her affection for him had grown rather than diminished; and she was glad that Lucinda, in whom there had been more marked personal improvements, seemed also to like him better.

No, Jessica said, she had heard nothing.

"Well, the Minster furnaces was all shut down this morning, and so was the work out at the ore-beds at Juno, and the men, boys, and girls in the Thessaly Company's mills all got word that wages was going

to be cut down. You can bet there's a buzz around town, with them three things coming all together, smack!"

"I suppose so," answered Jessica, still bending over her work of cleaning and picking out some plumes. "That looks bad for business this winter, doesn't it?"

Ben's relations with business, or with industry generally, were of the most remote and casual sort, but he had a lively objective interest in the topic.

"Why, it's the worst thing that ever happened," he said, with conviction. "There's seven hundred men thrown out already" (the figure was really two hundred and twelve), "and more than a thousand more got to git unless they'll work for starvation wages."

"It seems very hard," the girl made reply. The idea came to her that very possibly this would put an extra strain upon the facilities and financial strength of the Resting House.

"Hard!" her father exclaimed, stretching his hands over the stove-top; "them rich people are harder than Pharaoh's heart. What do them Minsters care about poor folks, whether they starve or freeze to death, or anything?"

"Oh, it is the Minsters, you say!" Jessica looked up now, with a new interest. "Sure enough, they own the furnaces. How could they have done such a thing, with winter right ahead of us?"

"It's all to make more money," put in Lucinda.

"Them that don't need it'll do anything to get it. What do they care? That Kate Minster of yours, for instance, she'll wear her sealskin and eat pie just the same. What does it matter to her?"

"No; she has a good heart. I know she has," said Jessica. "She wouldn't willingly do harm to any one. But perhaps she has nothing to do with managing such things. Yes, that must be it."

"I guess Schuyler Tenney and Hod Boyce about run the thing, from what I hear," commented the father. "Tenney's been bossing around since summer begun, and Boyce is the lawyer, so they say."

Ben suddenly stopped, and looked first at Jessica, then at Lucinda. Catching the latter's eye, he made furtive motions to her to leave the room; but she either did not or would not understand them, and continued stolidly at her work.

"That Kate you spoke about," he went on stumblingly, nodding hints at Lucinda to go away as he spoke, "she's the tall girl, with the black eyes and her chin up in the air, ain't she?"

"Yes," the two sisters answered, speaking together.

"Well, as I was saying about Hod Boyce," Ben said, and then stopped in evident embarrassment. Finally he added, confusedly avoiding Jessica's glance, "'Cindy, won't you jest step outside for a minute? I want to tell your sister something—something you don't know about."

"She knows about Horace Boyce, father," said

Jessica, flushing, but speaking calmly. "There is no need of her going."

Lucinda, however, wiped her hands on her apron, and went out into the store, shutting the door behind her. Then Ben, ostentatiously regarding the hands he held out over the stove, and turning them as if they had been fowls on a spit, sought hesitatingly for words with which to unbosom himself.

"You see," he began, "as I was a-saying, Hod Boyce is the lawyer, and he's pretty thick with Schuyler Tenney, his father's partner, which, of course, is only natural; and Tenney he kind of runs the whole thing—and—and that's it, don't you see!"

"You didn't send Lucinda out in order to tell me *that*, surely?"

"Well, no. But Hod being the lawyer, as I said, why, don't you see, he has a good deal to say for himself with the women-folks, and he's been off with them down to the sea-side, and so it's come about that they say—"

"They say what?" The girl had laid down her work altogether.

"They say he's going to marry the girl you call Kate—the big one with the black eyes."

The story was out. Jessica sat still under the revelation for a moment, and held up a restraining hand when her father offered to speak further. Then she rose and walked to and fro across the little room, in front of the stove where Ben sat, her hands hanging at her side and her brows bent with thought. At last she stopped before him and said:

"Tell me all over again about the stopping of the works—all you know about it."

Ben Lawton complied, and re-stated, with as much detail as he could command, the facts already exposed.

The girl listened carefully, but with growing disappointment. Somehow the notion had arisen in her mind that there would be something important in this story—something which it would be of use to understand. But her brain could make nothing significant out of this commonplace narrative of a lock-out and a threatened dispute about wages. Gradually, as she thought, two things rose as certainties upon the surface of her reflections.

"That scoundrel is to blame for both things. He advised her to avoid me, and he advised her to do this other mischief."

"I thought you'd like to know," Ben put in, deferentially. He felt a very humble individual indeed when his eldest daughter paced up and down and spoke in that tone.

"Yes, I'm glad I know," she said, swiftly. She eyed her father in an abstracted way for an instant, and then added, as if thinking aloud: "Well, then, my fine gentleman, you—simply—shall—*not*—marry Miss Minster!"

Ben moved uneasily in his seat, as if this warning had been personally addressed to him. "It *would* be pretty rough, for a fact, wouldn't it?" he said.

"Well, it won't *be* at all!" she made emphatic answer.

"I don't know as you can do much to pervent it, Jess," he ventured to say.

"Can't I? *Can't* I!" she exclaimed, with grim earnestness. "Wait and see."

Ben had waited all his life, and he proceeded now to take her at her word, sitting very still, and fixing a ruminative gaze on the side of the little stove. "All right," he said, wrapped in silence and the placidity of contented suspense.

But Jessica was now all eagerness and energy. She opened the store door, and called out to Lucinda with business-like decision of tone: "Come in now, and hurry dinner up as fast as you can. I want to catch the 1.20 train for Tecumseh."

The other two made no comment on this hasty resolve, but during the brief and not over-inviting meal which followed, watched their kinswoman with side-glances of uneasy surprise. The girl herself hastened through her dinner without a word of conversation, and then disappeared within the little chamber where she and Lucinda slept together.

It was only when she came out again, with her hat and cloak on and a little travelling-bag in her hand, that she felt impelled to throw some light on her intention. She took from her purse a bank-note and gave it to her sister.

"Shut up the store at half-past four or five to-day," she said; "and there are two things I want you to do for me outside. Go around the furniture stores, and get some kind of small sofa that will turn into a bed at night, and whatever extra bed-clothes

we need for it—as cheap as you can. We've got a pillow to spare, haven't we? You can put those two chairs out in the Resting House; that will make a place for the bed in this room. You must have it all ready when I get back to-morrow night. You needn't say anything to the girls, except that I am away for a day. And then—or no: *you* can do it better, father."

The girl had spoken swiftly, but with ready precision. As she turned now to the wondering Ben, she lost something of her collected demeanor, and hesitated for a moment.

"I want you—I want you to see Reuben Tracy, and ask him to come here at six to-morrow," she said. She deliberated upon this for an instant, and held out her hand as if she had changed her mind. Then she nodded, and said: "Or no: tell him I will come to his office, and at six sharp. It will be better that way."

When she had perfunctorily kissed them both, and gone, silence fell upon the room. Ben took his pipe out of his pocket and looked at it with tentative longing, and then at the stove.

"You can go out in the yard and smoke, if you want to, but not in here," said Lucinda, promptly. "You wouldn't dare think of such a thing if she were here," she added, with reproach.

Ben put back his pipe and seated himself again by the fire. "Mighty queer girl, that, eh?" he said. "When she gets stirred up, she's a hustler, eh?"

"It must be she takes it from you," said Lucinda, with a modified grin of irony.

The sarcasm fell short of its mark. "No," said Ben, with quiet candor, "she gets it from my father. He used to count on licking a lock-tender somewhere along the canal every time he made a trip. I remember there was one particular fellow on the Montezuma Ma'ash that he used to whale for choice, but any of 'em would do on a pinch. He was jest blue-mouldy for a fight all the while, your grandfather was. He was Benjamin Franklin Lawton, the same as me, but somehow I never took much to rassling round or fighting. It's more in my line to take things easy."

Lucinda bore an armful of dishes out into the kitchen, without making any reply, and Ben, presently wearying of solitude, followed to where she bent over the sink, enveloped in soap-suds and steam.

"I suppose you've got an idea what she's gone for?" he propounded, with caution.

"It's a '*who*' she's gone for," said Lucinda.

Pronouns were not Ben's strong point, and he said, "Yes, I suppose it is," rather helplessly. He waited in patience for more information, and by and by it came.

"If I was her, I wouldn't do it," said Lucinda, slapping a plate impatiently with the wet cloth.

"No, I don't suppose you would. In some ways you always had more sense than people give you credit for, *Cindy*," remarked the father, with guarded

flattery. "Jess, now, she's one of your hoity-toity kind—flare up and whirl around like a wheel on a tree in the Fourth of July fireworks."

"She's head and shoulders above all the other Lawtons there ever was or ever will be, and don't you forget it!" declared the loyal Lucinda, with fervor.

"That's what I say always," assented Ben. "Only—I thought you said you didn't think she was quite right in doing what she's going to do."

"It's right enough; only she was happy here, and this'll make her miserable again—though, of course, she was always letting her mind run on it, and perhaps she'll enjoy having it with her—only the girls may talk—and—"

Lucinda let her sentence die off unfinished in a rattle of knives and spoons in the dish-pan. Her mind was sorely perplexed.

"Well, 'Cindy," said Ben, in the frankness of despair, "I'm dot-rotted if I know what you are talking about." He grew pathetic as he went on: "I'm your father and I'm her father, and there ain't neither of you got a better friend on earth than I be; but you never tell me anything, any more'n as if I was a last year's bird's-nest."

Lucinda's reserve yielded to this appeal. "Well, dad," she said, with unwonted graciousness of tone, "Jess has gone to Tecumseh to bring back—to bring her little boy. She hasn't told me so, but I know it."

The father nodded his head in comprehension,

and said nothing. He had vaguely known of the existence of the child, and he saw more or less clearly the reason for this present step. The shame and sorrow which were fastened upon his family through this grandson whom he had never seen, and never spoken of above a whisper, seemed to rankle in his heart with a new pain of mingled bitterness and compassion.

He mechanically took out his pipe, filled it from loose tobacco in his pocket, and struck a match to light it. Then he recalled that the absent daughter objected to his smoking in the house, on account of the wares in her shop, and let the flame burn itself out in the coal-scuttle. A whimsical query as to whether this calamitous boy had also been named Benjamin Franklin crossed his confused mind, and then it perversely raised the question whether the child, if so named, would be a "hustler" or not. Ben leaned heavily against the door-sill, and surrendered himself to humiliation.

"What I don't understand," he heard Lucinda saying after a time, "is why she took this spurt all of a sudden."

"It's all on account of that Gawd-damned Hod Boyce!" groaned Ben.

"Yes; you told her something about him. What was it?"

"Only that they all say that he's going to marry that big Minster girl—the black-eyed one."

Lucinda turned away from the sink, threw down her dish-cloth with a thud, and put her arms akimbo

and her shoulders well back. Watching her, Ben felt that somehow this girl, too, took after her grandfather rather than him.

"Oh, *is* he!" she said, her voice high-pitched and vehement. "I guess *we'll* have something to say about *that*!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A VISITATION OF ANGELS.

REUBEN TRACY waited in his office next day for the visit of the milliner, but, to tell the truth, devoted very little thought to wondering about her errand.

The whole summer and autumn, as he sat now and smoked in meditation upon them, seemed to have been an utterly wasted period in his life. He had done nothing worth recalling. His mind had not even evolved good ideas. Through all the interval which lay between this November day and that afternoon in March, when he had been for the only time inside the Minster house, one solitary set thought had possessed his mind. Long ago it had formulated itself in his brain; found its way to the silent, spiritual tongue with which we speak to ourselves. He loved Kate Minster, and had had room for no other feeling all these months.

At first, when this thought was still new to him, he had hugged it to his heart with delight. Now the melancholy days indeed were come, and he had only suffering and disquiet from it. She had never even answered his letter proffering assistance. She was as far away from him, as coldly unattainable, as the

north star. It made him wretched to muse upon her beauty and charm; his heart was weary with hopeless longing for her friendship—yet he was powerless to command either mind or heart. They clung to her with painful persistency; they kept her image before him, whispered her name in his ear, filled all his dreams with her fair presence, to make each waking a fresh grief.

In his revolt against this weakness, Reuben had burned the little scented note for which so reverential a treasure-box had been made in his desk. But this was of no avail. He could never enter that small inner room where he now sat without glancing at the drawer which had once been consecrated to the letter.

It was humiliating that he should prove to have so little sense and strength. He bit his cigar fiercely with annoyance when this aspect of the case rose before him. If love meant anything, it meant a mutual sentiment. By all the lights of philosophy, it was not possible to love a person who did not return that love. This he said to himself over and over again, but the argument was not helpful. Still his mind remained perversely full of Kate Minster.

During all this time he had taken no step to probe the business which had formed the topic of that single disagreeable talk with his partner in the preceding March. Miss Minster's failure to answer his letter had deeply wounded his pride, and had put it out of the question that he should seem to meddle in her affairs. He had never mentioned the subject

again to Horace. The two young men had gone through the summer and autumn under the same office roof, engaged very often upon the same business, but with mutual formality and personal reserve. No controversy had arisen between them, but Reuben was conscious now that they had ceased to be friends, as men understand the term, for a long time.

For his own part, his dislike for his partner had grown so deep and strong that he felt doubly bound to guard himself against showing it. It was apparent to the most superficial introspection that a good deal of his aversion to Horace arose from the fact that he was on friendly terms with the Minsters, and could see Miss Kate every day. He never looked at his partner without remembering this, and extracting unhappiness from the thought. But he realized that this was all the more reason why he should not yield to his feelings. Both his pride and his sense of fairness restrained him from quarrelling with Horace on grounds of that sort.

But the events of the last day or two had opened afresh the former dilemma about a rupture over the Minster works business. Since Schuyler Tenney had blossomed forth as the visible head of the rolling-mills, Reuben had, in spite of his pique and of his resolution not to be betrayed into meddling, kept a close watch upon events connected with the two great iron manufacturing establishments. He had practically learned next to nothing, but he was none the less convinced that a swindle underlay what was going on.

It was with this same conviction that he now strove to understand the shutting-down of the furnaces and ore-fields owned by the Minsters, and the threatened lockout in the Thessaly Manufacturing Company's mills. But it was very difficult to see where dishonesty could come in. The furnaces and ore-supply had been stopped by an order of the pig-iron trust, but of course the owners would be amply compensated for that. The other company's resolve to reduce wages meant, equally of course, a desire to make up on the pay-list the loss entailed by the closing of the furnaces, which compelled it to secure its raw material elsewhere. Taken by themselves, each transaction was intelligible. But considered together, and as both advised by the same men, they seemed strangely in conflict. What possible reason could the Thessaly Company, for example, have for urging Mrs. Minster to enter a trust, the chief purpose of which was to raise the price of pig-iron which they themselves bought almost entirely? The problem puzzled Reuben. He racked his brain in futile search for the missing clew to this financial paradox. Evidently there was such a clew somewhere; an initial fact which would explain the whole mystery, if only it could be got at. He had for his own satisfaction collected some figures about the Minster business, partly exact, partly estimated, and he had worked laboriously over these in the effort to discover the false quantity which he felt sure was somewhere concealed. But thus far his work had been in vain.

Just now a strange idea for the moment fascinated his inclination. It was nothing else than the thought of putting his pride in his pocket—of going to Miss Minster and saying frankly: "I believe you are being robbed. In Heaven's name, give me a chance to find out, and to protect you if I am right! I shall ask no reward. I shall not even ask ever to see you again, once the rescue is achieved. But oh! do not send me away until then—I pray you that!"

While the wild project urged itself upon his mind the man himself seemed able to stand apart and watch this battle of his own thoughts and longings, like an outside observer. He realized that the passion he had nursed so long in silence had affected his mental balance. He was conscious of surprise, almost of a hysterical kind of amusement, that Reuben Tracy should be so altered as to think twice about such a proceeding. Then he fell to deploring and angrily reviling the change that had come over him; and lo! all at once he found himself strangely glad of the change, and was stretching forth his arms in a fantasy of yearning toward a dream figure in creamy-white robes, girdled with a silken cord, and was crying out in his soul, "I love you!"

The vision faded away in an instant as there came the sound of rapping at the outer door. Reuben rose to his feet, his brain still bewildered by the sun-like brilliancy of the picture which had been burned into it, and confusedly collected his thoughts

as he walked across the larger room. His partner had been out of town some days, and he had sent the office-boy home, in order that the Lawton girl might be able to talk in freedom. The knocking was that of a woman's hand. Evidently it was Jessica, who had come an hour or so earlier than she had appointed. He wondered vaguely what her errand might be, as he opened the door.

In the dingy hallway stood two figures instead of one, both thickly clad and half veiled. The waning light of late afternoon did not enable him to recognize his visitors with any certainty. The smaller lady of the two might be Jessica—the one who stood farthest away. He had almost resolved that it was, in this moment of mental dubiety, when the other, putting out her gloved hand, said to him :

“I am afraid you don't remember me, it is so long since we met. This is ~~my~~ sister, Mr. Tracy—Miss Ethel Minster.”

The door-knob creaked in Reuben's hand as he pressed upon it for support, and there were eccentric flashes of light before his eyes.

“Oh, I am *so* glad!” was what he said. “Do come in—do come in.” He led the way into the office with a dazed sense of heading a triumphal procession, and then stopped in the centre of the room, suddenly remembering that he had not shaken hands. Was it too late now? To give himself time to think, he lighted the gas in both offices and closed all the shutters.

“Oh, I am *so* glad!” he repeated, as he turned to

the two ladies. The radiant smile on his face bore out his words. "I am afraid the little room—my own place—is full of cigar-smoke. Let me see about the fire here." He shook the grate vehemently, and poked down the coals through one of the upper windows. "Perhaps it will be warm enough here. Let me bring some chairs." He bustled into the inner room, and pushed out his own revolving desk-chair, and drew up two others from different ends of the office. The easiest chair of all, which was at Horace's table, he did not touch. Then, when his two visitors had taken seats, he beamed down upon them once more, and said for the third time :

"I really *am* delighted!"

Miss Kate put up her short veil with a frank gesture. The unaffected pleasure which shone in Reuben's face and radiated from his manner was something more exuberant than she had expected, but it was grateful to her, and she and her sister both smiled in response.

"I have an apology to make first of all, Mr. Tracy," she said, and her voice was the music of the seraphim to his senses. "I don't think—I am afraid I never answered your kind letter last spring. It is a bad habit of mine; I am the worst correspondent in the world. And then we went away so soon afterward."

"I beg that you won't mention it," said Reuben; and indeed it seemed to him to be a trivial thing now—not worth a thought, much less a word. He

had taken a chair also, and was at once intoxicated with the rapture of looking Kate in the face thus again, and nervous lest the room was not warm enough.

"Won't you loosen your wraps?" he asked, with solicitude. "I am afraid you won't feel them when you go out." It was an old formula which he had heard his mother use with callers at the farm, but which he himself had never uttered before in his life. But then he had never before been pervaded with such a tender anxiety for the small comforts of visitors.

Miss Kate opened the throat of her fur coat. "We sha'n't stay long," she said. "We must be home to dinner." She paused for a moment and then asked: "Is there any likelihood of our seeing your partner, Mr. Boyce, here to-day?"

Reuben's face fell on the instant. Alas, poor fool, he thought, to imagine there were angels' visits for you!

"No," he answered, gloomily. "I am afraid not. He is out of town."

"Oh, we didn't want to see him," put in Miss Ethel. "Quite the contrary."

Reuben's countenance recovered all its luminous radiance. He stole a glance at this younger girl's face, and felt that he almost loved her too.

"No," Miss Kate went on, "in fact, we took the opportunity of his being away to come and try to see you alone. We are dreadfully anxious, Mr. Tracy, about the way things are going on."

The lawyer could not restrain a comprehending nod of the head, but he did not speak.

"We do not understand at all what is being done," proceeded Kate. "There is nobody to explain things to us except the men who are doing those things, and it seems to us that they tell us just what they like. We may be doing them an injustice, but we are very nervous about a good many matters. That is why we came to you."

Reuben bowed again. There was an instant's pause, and then he opened one of the little mica doors in the stove. "I'm afraid this isn't going to burn up," he said. "If you don't mind smoke, the other room is much warmer."

It was not until he had safely bestowed his precious visitors in the cosier room, and persuaded them to loosen all their furs, that his mind was really at ease. "Now," he remarked, with a smile of relief, "now go ahead. Tell me everything."

"We have this difficulty," said Kate, hesitatingly; "when I spoke to you before, you felt that you couldn't act in the matter, or learn things, or advise us, on account of the partnership. And as that still exists—why—" She broke off with an inquiring sigh.

"My dear Miss Minster," Reuben answered, in a voice so firm and full of force that it bore away in front of it all possibility of suspecting that he was too bold, "when I left you I wanted to tell you, when I wrote to you I tried to have you understand, that if there arose a question of honestly helping

you, of protecting you, and the partnership stood between me and that act of honorable service, I would crush the partnership like an eggshell, and put all my powers at your disposal. But I am afraid you did not understand."

The two girls looked at each other, and then at the strong face before them, with the focussed light of the argand burner upon it.

"No," said Kate, "I am afraid we didn't."

"And so I say to you now," pursued Reuben, with a sense of exultation in the resolute words as they sounded on his ear, "I will not allow any professional chimeras to bind me to inactivity, to acquiescence, if a wrong is being done to you. And more, I will do all that lies in my power to help you understand the whole situation. And if, when it is all mapped out before us, you need my assistance to set crooked things straight, why, with all my heart you shall have it, and the partnership shall go out of the window."

"If you had said that at the beginning," sighed Kate.

"Ah, then I did not know what I know now!" answered Reuben, holding her eyes with his, while the light on his face grew ruddier.

"Well, then, this is what I can tell you," said the elder girl, "and I am to tell it to you as our lawyer, am I not—our lawyer in the sense that Mr. Boyce is mamma's lawyer?"

Reuben bowed, and settled himself in his chair to listen. It was a long recital, broken now by sugges-

tions from Ethel, now by questions from the lawyer. From time to time he made notes on the blotter before him, and when the narrative was finished he spent some moments in consulting these, and combining them with figures from another paper, in new columns. Then he said, speaking slowly and with deliberation :

“ This I take to be the situation : You are millionaires, and are in a strait for money. When I say ‘ you ’ I speak of your mother and yourselves as one. Your income, which formerly gave you a surplus of sixty thousand or seventy thousand dollars a year for new investments, is all at once not large enough to pay the interest on your debts, let alone your household and personal expenses. First, what has become of this income ? It came from three sources—the furnaces, the telegraph stock, and a group of minor properties. These furnaces and iron-mines, which were all your own until you were persuaded to put a mortgage on them, have been closed by the orders of outsiders with whom you were persuaded to combine. Exit your income from *that* source. Telegraph competition has cut down your earnings from the Northern Union stock to next to nothing. No doubt we shall find that your income from the other properties has been absorbed in salaries voted to themselves by the men into whose hands you have fallen. That is a very old trick, and I shall be surprised if it does not turn up here. In the second place, you are heavily in debt. On the 1st of January next, you must borrow money, apparently, to pay

the interest on this debt. What makes it the harder is that you have not, as far as I can discover, had any value received whatever for this debt. In other words, you are being swindled out of something like one hundred thousand dollars per year, and not even such a property as your father left can stand *that* very long. I should say it was high time you came to somebody for advice."

Before this terribly lucid statement the two girls sat aghast.

It was Ethel who first found something to say. "We never dreamed of this, Mr. Tracy," she said, breathlessly. "Our idea in coming, what we thought of most, was the poor people being thrown out of work in the winter, like this, and it being in some way, *our* fault!"

"People *think* it is our fault," interposed Kate. "Only to-day, as we were driving here, there were some men standing on the corner, and one of them called out a very cruel thing about us, as if we had personally injured him. But what you tell me—is it really as bad as that?"

"I am afraid it is quite as bad as I have pictured it."

"And what is to be done? There must be some way to stop it," said Kate.

"You will put these men in prison the first thing, won't you, Mr. Tracy?" asked Ethel. "And oh, I forgot! Who are the men who are robbing us?"

Reuben smiled gravely, and ignored the latter question. "There are a good many first things to

do," he said. "I must think it all over very carefully before any step is taken. But the very beginning will be, I think, for you both to revoke the power of attorney your mother holds for you, and to obtain a statement of her management of the trusteeship over your property."

"She will refuse it plump! You don't know mamma," said Ethel.

"She couldn't refuse if the demand were made regularly, could she, Mr. Tracy?" asked Kate. He shook his head, and she went on: "But it seems dreadful not to act *with* mamma in the matter. Just think what a situation it will be, to bring our lawyer up to fight her lawyer! It sounds unnatural, doesn't it? Don't you think, Mr. Tracy, if you were to speak to her now—"

"No, that could hardly be, unless she asked me," returned the lawyer.

"Well, then, if I told her all you said, or you wrote it out for me to show her."

"No, nor that either," said Reuben. "To speak frankly, Miss Minster, your mother is perhaps the most difficult and dangerous element in the whole problem. I hope you won't be offended—but that any woman in her senses could have done what she seems to have done, is almost incredible."

"Poor mamma!" commented Ethel. "She never would listen to advice."

"Unfortunately, that is just what she has done," broke in Kate. "Mr. Tracy, tell me candidly, is it possible that the man who advised her to do these

things—or rather the two men, both lawyers, who advised her—could have done so honestly?”

“I should say it was impossible,” answered Reuben, after a pause.

Again the two girls exchanged glances, and then Kate, looking at her watch, rose to her feet. “We are already late, Mr. Tracy,” she said, offering him her hand, and unconsciously allowing him to hold it in his own as she went on: “We are both deeply indebted to you. We want you—oh, so much!—to help us. We will do everything you say; we will put ourselves completely in your hands, won’t we, Ethel?”

The younger sister said “Yes, indeed!” and then smiled as she furtively glanced up into Kate’s face and thence downward to her hand. Kate herself with a flush and murmur of confusion withdrew the fingers which the lawyer still held.

“Then you must begin,” he said, not striving very hard to conceal the delight he had had from that stolen custody of the gloved hand, “by resolving not to say a word to anybody—least of all to your mother—about having consulted me. You must realize that we have to deal with criminals—it is a harsh word, I know, but there can be no other—and that to give them warning before our plans are laid would be a folly almost amounting to crime itself. If I may, Miss Kate”—there was a little gulp in his throat as he safely passed this perilous first use of the familiar name—“I will write to you to-morrow, outlining my suggestions in detail, telling you what

to do, perhaps something of what I am going to do, and naming a time—subject, of course, to your convenience—when we would better meet again.”

Thus, after some further words on the same lines, the interview ended. Reuben went to the door with them, and would have descended to the street to bear them company, but they begged him not to expose himself to the cold, and so, with gracious adieus, left him in his office and went down the narrow, unlighted staircase, picking their way.

On the landing, where some faint reflection of the starlight and gas-light outside filtered through the musty atmosphere, Kate paused a moment to gather the weaker form of her sister protectingly close to her.

“Are you utterly tired out, pet?” she asked. “I’m afraid it’s been too much for you.”

“Oh, no,” said Ethel. “Only—yes, I am tired of one thing—of your slowness of perception. Why, child alive, Mr. Tracy has been just burning to take up our cause ever since he first saw you. You thought he was indifferent, and all the while he was over head and ears in love with you! I watched him every moment, and it was written all over his face; and you never saw it!”

The answering voice fell with a caressing imitation of reproof upon the darkness: “You silly puss, you think everybody is in love with me!” it said.

Then the two young ladies, furred and tippeted, emerged upon the sidewalk, stepped into their carriage, and were whirled off homeward under the starlight.

A few seconds later, two other figures, a woman and a child, also emerged from this same stairway, and, there being no coachman in waiting for them, started on foot down the street. The woman was Jessica Lawton, and she walked wearily with drooping head and shoulders, never once looking at the little boy whose hand she held, and who followed her in wondering patience.

She had stood in the stairway, drawn up against the wall to let these descending ladies pass. She had heard all they said, and had on the instant recognized Kate Minster's voice. For a moment, in this darkness suddenly illumined by Ethel's words, she had reflected. Then she, too, had turned and come down the stairs again. It seemed best, under these new circumstances, not to see Reuben Tracy just now. And as she slowly walked home, she almost forgot the existence of the little boy, so deeply was her mind engaged with what she had heard.

As for Reuben, the roseate dreams had all come back. From the drear mournfulness of chill November his heart had leaped, by a fairy transition, straight into the bowers of June, where birds sang and fountains plashed, and beauty and happiness were the only law. It would be time enough to-morrow to think about this great struggle with cunning scoundrels for the rescue of a princely fortune, which

opened before him. This evening his mind should dwell upon nothing but thoughts of *her* !

And so it happened that an hour later, when he decided to lock up the office and go over to supper, he had never once remembered that the Lawton girl's appointment remained unkept.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OVERWHELMING DISCOMFITURE.

MR. HORACE BOYCE returned to Thessaly the next morning and drove at once to his father's house. There, after a longer and more luxurious bath than usual, he breakfasted at his leisure, and then shaved and dressed himself with great care. He had brought some new clothes from New York, and as he put them on he did not regret the long detour to the metropolis, both in going to and coming from Pittsburg, which had been made in order to secure them. The frock coat was peculiarly to his liking. No noble dandy in all the West End of London owed his tailor for a more perfectly fitting garment. It was not easy to decide as to the neckwear which should best set off the admirable upper lines of this coat, but at last he settled on a lustreless, fine-ribbed tie of white silk, into which he set a beautiful moonstone pin that Miss Kate had once praised. Decidedly, the *ensemble* left nothing to be desired.

Horace, having completely satisfied himself, took off the coat again, went down-stairs in his velveteen lounging-jacket, and sought out his father in the library, which served as a smoking-room for the two men.

The General sat in one chair, with his feet comfortably disposed on another, and with a cup of coffee on still a third at his side. He was reading that morning's *Thessaly Banner*, through passing clouds of cigar-smoke. His brow was troubled.

"Hello, you're back, are you?" was his greeting to his son. "I see the whole crowd of workmen in your rolling-mills decided last night not to submit to the new scale; unanimous, the paper says. Seen it?"

"No, but I guessed they would," said Horace, nonchalantly. "They can all be damned."

The General turned over his paper. "There's an editorial," he went on, "taking the workmen's side, out and out. Says there's something very mysterious about the whole business. Winds up with a hint that steps will be taken to test the legality of the trust, and probe the conspiracy that underlies it. Those are the words—'probe the conspiracy.' Evidently, you're going to have John Fairchild in your wool. He's a good fighter, once you get him stirred up."

"He can be damned, too," said Horace, taking a chair and lighting a cigar. "These free-trade editors make a lot of noise, but they don't do anything else. They're merely blue-bottle flies on a window-pane—a deuce of a nuisance to nervous people, that's all. I'm not nervous, myself."

The General smiled with good-humored sarcasm at his offspring. "Seems to me it wasn't so long ago that you were tarred with the same brush yourself," he commented.

"Most fellows are free-traders until it touches their own pockets, or rather until they get something in their pockets to be touched. Then they learn sense," replied Horace.

"You can count them by thousands," said the General. "But what of the other poor devils—the millions of consumers who pay through the nose, in order to keep those pockets full, eh? They never seem to learn sense."

Horace smiled a little, and then stretched out his limbs in a comprehensive yawn. "I can't sleep on the cars as well as I used to," he said, in explanation. "I almost wish now I'd gone to bed when I got home. I don't want to be sleepy *this* afternoon, of all times."

The General had returned to his paper. "I see there's a story afloat that you chaps mean to bring in French Canadian workmen, when the other fellows are locked out. I thought there was a contract labor law against that."

Horace yawned again, and then, rising, poured out a little glassful of spirits from a bottle on the mantel, and tossed it off. "No," he said, "it's easy enough to get around that. Wendover is up to all those dodges. Besides, I think they are already domiciled in Massachusetts."

"Vane" Boyce laid down the paper and took off his eye-glasses. "I hope these fellows haven't got you into a scrape," he remarked, eyeing his son. "I don't more than half like this whole business."

"Don't you worry," was Horace's easy response.

"I'll take good care of myself. If it comes to 'dog eat dog,' they'll find my teeth are filed down to a point quite as sharp as theirs are."

"Maybe so," said the father, doubtfully. "But that Tenney—he's got eyes in the back of his head."

"My dear fellow," said Horace, with a pleasant air of patronage, "he's a mere child compared with Wendover. But I'm not afraid of them both. I'm going to play a card this afternoon that will take the wind out of both their sails. When that is done, I'll be in a position to lay down the law to them, and read the riot act too, if necessary."

The General looked inquiry, and Horace went on:

"I want you to call for me at the office at three, and then we'll go together to the Minsters. I wouldn't smoke after luncheon, if I were you. I'm not going down until afternoon. I'll explain to you what my idea is as we walk out there. You've got some 'heavy father' business to do."

Horace lay at his ease for a couple of hours in the big chair his father had vacated, and mused upon the splendor of his position. This afternoon he was to ask Kate Minster to be his wife, and of the answer he had no earthly doubt. His place thus made secure, he had some highly interesting things to say to Wendover and Tenney. He had fathomed their plans, he thought, and could at the right moment turn them to his advantage. He had not paid this latest visit to the iron magnates of Pennsylvania for nothing. He saw that Wendover had counted upon their postponing all discussion of the compensation

to be given the Minsters for the closing of their furnaces until after January 1, in order that when that date came, and Mrs. Minster had not the money to pay the half-yearly twelve thousand dollars interest on the bonds, she would be compelled to borrow still more from him, and thus tighten the hold which he and Tenney had on the Minster property. It was a pretty scheme, but Horace felt that he could block it. For one thing, he was certain that he could induce the outside trust directors to pass upon the question of compensation long before January. And even if this failed, he could himself raise the money which Mrs. Minster would need. This he would do. Then he would turn around and demand an accounting from these scoundrels of the four hundred thousand dollars employed in buying the machinery rights, and levy upon the plant of the Thessaly Manufacturing Company, if necessary, to secure Mrs. Minster's interests. It became all very clear to his mind, now he thought it over, and he metaphorically snapped his fingers at Wendover and Tenney as he went up-stairs and once more carefully dressed himself.

The young man stopped in the hall-way as he came down and enjoyed a comprehensive view of himself in the large mirror which was framed by the hat-rack. The frock coat and the white effect at the neck were excellent. The heavy fur collar of the outer coat only heightened their beauty, and the soft, fawn-tinted suède gloves were quite as charming in the contrast they afforded under the cuffs of

the same costly fur. Horace put his glossy hat just a trifle to one side, and was too happy even to curse the climate which made rubbers over his patent-leather shoes a necessity.

He remembered that minute before the looking-glass, in the after-time, as the culmination of his upward career. It was the proudest, most perfectly contented moment of his adult life.

"There is something I want to say to you before you go."

Reuben Tracy stood at the door of a small inner office, and looked steadily at his partner as he uttered these words.

There was little doing in the law in these few dead-and-alive weeks between terms, and the exquisitely dressed Horace, having gone through his letters and signed some few papers, still with one of his gloves on, had decided not to wait for his father, but to call instead at the hardware store.

"I am in a bit of a hurry just now," he said, drawing on the other glove. "I may look in again before dinner. Won't it keep till then?"

"It isn't very long," answered Reuben. "I've concluded that the partnership was a mistake. It is open to either of us to terminate it at will. I wish you would look around, and let me know as soon as you see your way to—to—"

"To getting out," interposed Horace. In his present mood the idea rather pleased him than otherwise. "With the greatest pleasure in the world.

You have not been alone in thinking that the partnership was a mistake, I can assure you."

"Then we understand each other?"

"Perfectly."

"And you will be back, say at—"

"Say at half-past five."

"Half-past five be it," said Reuben, turning back again to his desk.

Horace made his way across the muddy high street and found his father, who smelt rather more of tobacco than could have been wished, but otherwise was in complete readiness.

"By the way," remarked the young man, as the two walked briskly along, "I've given Tracy notice that I'm going to leave the firm. I daresay we shall separate almost immediately. The business hasn't been by any means up to my expectations, and, besides, I have too much already to do for the Minster estate, and am by way, now, of having a good deal more."

"I'm sorry, for all that," said the General. "Tracy is a first-rate, honest, straightforward fellow. It always did me good to feel that you were with him. To tell you the truth, my boy," he went on after a pause, "I'm damnably uneasy about your being so thick with Tenney and that gang, and separating yourself from Tracy. It has an unsafe look."

"Tracy is a tiresome prig," was Horace's comment. "I've stood him quite long enough."

The conversation turned now upon the object of

their expedition, and when this had been explained to the General, and his part in it outlined, he had forgotten his forebodings about his son's future.

That son himself, as he strode along, with his head well up and his shoulders squared, was physically an object upon which the paternal eye could look with entire pride. The General said to himself that he was not only the best-dressed, but the handsomest young fellow in all Dearborn County ; and from this it was but a mental flash to the recollection that the Boyces had always been handsome fellows, and the old soldier recalled with satisfaction how well he himself had felt that he looked when he rode away from Thessaly at the head of his regiment after the firing on Fort Sumter.

Mrs. Minster came down alone to the drawing-room to receive her visitors, and showed by her manner some surprise that the General accompanied his son.

" I rather wanted to talk with you about what you learned at Pittsburg," she said, somewhat bluntly, to Horace, after conversation on ordinary topics had begun to flag.

The General rose at this. " Pray let me go into the library for a time, I beg of you," he said, in his courtly, cheery manner. " I know the way, and I can amuse myself there till you want me ; that is," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, " if you decide that you want me at all."

Mrs. Minster bowed as the General went off. She did not quite understand what this stout, red-faced

man meant by being wanted, and she was extremely anxious to know all that her lawyer had to tell her about the trust.

What he had to tell her was eminently satisfactory. The directors had postponed the question of how much money should be paid for the shutting-down of the Minster furnaces, simply because it was taken for granted that so opulent a concern could not be in a hurry about a settlement. He was sure that he could have the affair all arranged before December. As to other matters, he was equally confident. A year hence she would be in vastly better condition, financially, than she had ever been before. Under these assurances Mrs. Minster purred visible content.

Then Horace began to introduce the subject nearest his heart. The family had been excessively kind to him during the summer, he said. He had been privileged to meet them on terms of almost intimacy, both here and elsewhere. Every day of this delightful intercourse had but strengthened his original desire. True to his word, he had never uttered a syllable of what lay on his heart to Miss Kate, but he was not without confidence that she looked upon him favorably. They had seemed always the best of friends, and she had accepted from him attentions which must have shadowed forth to her, at least vaguely, the state of his mind. He had brought his father—in accordance with what he felt to be the courtesy due from one old family to another—to formally speak with her upon the sub-

ject, if she desired it, and then he himself, if she thought it best, would beg for an interview with Miss Kate. Or did Mrs. Minster think it preferable to leave this latter to the sweet arbitrament of chance?

Horace looked so well in his new clothes, and talked with such fluency of feeling, and moreover had brought such comforting intelligence about the business troubles, that Mrs. Minster found herself at the end smiling on him maternally, and murmuring some sort of acquiescence to his remarks in general.

"Then shall I bring in my father?" He asked the question eagerly, and rising before she could reply, went swiftly to the door of the hall and opened it.

Then he stopped with abruptness, and held the door open with a hand that began to tremble as the color left his face.

A voice in the hall was speaking, and with such sharply defined distinctness and high volume that each word reached even the mother where she sat.

"*You may tell your son, General Boyce,*" said this voice, "*that I will not see him. I am sorry to have to say it to you, who have always been polite to me, but your son is not a good man or an honest man, and I wish never to see him again. With all my heart I wish, too, that we never had seen him, any of us.*"

An indistinct sound of pained remonstrance arose outside as the echoes of this first voice died away. Then followed a noise of footsteps ascending the

carpeted stairs, and Horace's empty, staring eyes had a momentary vision of a woman's form passing rapidly upward, away from him.

Then he stood face to face with his father—a bleared, swollen, indignant countenance it was that thrust itself close to his—and he heard his father say, huskily:

“I am going. Let us get out of this house.”

Horace mechanically started to follow. Then he remembered that he had left his hat behind, and went back into the drawing-room where Mrs. Minster sat. The absence of deep emotion on her statuesque face momentarily restored his own presence of mind.

“You have heard your daughter?” he said, his head hanging in spite of himself, but his eyes keeping a strenuous scrutiny upon her face.

“Yes: I don't know what has come over Kate, lately,” remarked Mrs. Minster; “she always was the most curious girl.”

“Curious, indeed!” He choked down the sneer which tempted him, and went on slowly: “You heard what she said—that I was dishonest, wicked. Where she has suddenly got this new view of me, doesn't matter—at least, just at this moment. But I surely ought to ask if you—if you share it. Of course, if I haven't your confidence, why, I must lay down everything.”

“Oh, mercy, no! You mustn't think of it,” the lady said, with animation. “I'm sure I don't know in the least what it all means. I never do know

with my daughters. They get all sorts of crazy notions. It makes my head ache sometimes wondering what they will do next—Kate, especially. No, you mustn't mind her. You really mustn't."

The young man's manner had gradually taken on firmness, as if under a coat of ice. The glance which he still bent upon Mrs. Minster had a novel glitter in it now.

"Then I am to remain your lawyer, in spite of this, as if it hadn't happened?"

"Why, bless me, yes! Why not? Girls will be girls, I suppose. At least, that is the saying. But—oh, by all means! You must see me through this dreadful trust business, though, as you say, it must all be better in the end than ever before."

"Good-day, Mrs. Minster. I shall continue, then, to hold myself at your service."

He spoke with the same grave slowness, and bowed formally, as if to go.

The lady rose, and of her own volition offered him her hand. "Perhaps things will alter in her mind. I am so sorry!" she said.

The young man permitted himself a ghostly half-smile. "It is only when I have thought it all over that I shall know whether I am sorry or not," he said, and bowing again he left her.

Out by the gate, standing on the gravel-path wet with November rain and strewn with damp, fallen leaves, the General waited for him. The air had grown chill, and the sky was spreading a canopy for the night of gloomy gray clouds. The two men,

without a word, fell into step, and walked down the street together. What was there to say?

Horace, striding silently along with his teeth tight set, his head bowed and full of fierce confusion of thought, and his eyes angrily fixed on the nothing straight ahead, became, all at once, aware that his office-boy was approaching on the sidewalk, whistling dolefully to suit the weather, and carrying his hands in his pockets.

"Where are you going, Robert?" the lawyer demanded, stopping the lad, and speaking with the aggressive abruptness of a man longing to affront all about him.

"To Mrs. Minster's," answered the boy, wondering what was up, and confusedly taking his hands out of his pockets.

"What for?" This second question was even more sharply put.

"This letter from Mr. Tracy." The boy took a letter from the inside of his coat, and then added: "I said Mrs. Minster, but the letter is for her daughter. I'm to give it to her herself."

"I'll take charge of it myself," said Horace, with swift decision, stretching out his hand.

But another hand was reached forth also, and grasped the young man's extended wrist with a vehement grip.

"No, by God! you won't!" swore the General, his face purpling with the rush of angry blood, and his little gray eyes flashing. "No, sir, you won't!" he repeated; and then, bending a momentary glance

upon the boy, he snapped out : " Well, you ! don't stand staring here ! Go and do your errand as you were told ! "

The office-boy started with a run to obey his command, and did not slacken his pace until he had turned a corner. He had never encountered a real general in action before, and the experience impressed him.

Father and son looked in silence into each other's faces for an instant. Then the father said, with something between a curse and a groan :

" My God ! the girl was right ! You *are* a damned scoundrel ! "

" Well, however that may be," replied Horace, frowning, " I'm not in the mood just now to take any cheek, least of all from you ! "

As the General stared at him with swelling rage in his fat face, and quivering, inarticulate lips, his son went on in a bitter voice, from between clinched teeth :

" I owe this to you ! to nobody else but you ! Everything I did was done to lift you out of the gutter, to try and make a man of you again, to put you back into decent society—to have the name of Boyce something else once more besides a butt for bar-keepers and factory-girls. I had you around my neck like a mill-stone, and you've pulled me down. I hope you're satisfied ! "

For a moment it seemed as if the General would fall. His thick neck grew scarlet, his eyes turned opaque and filled with tears, and he trembled and almost tottered on his legs. Then the fit passed as

suddenly as it had come. He threw a sweeping glance up and down the figure of his son—taking in the elegant line of the trousers, the costly fur, the delicate, spotless gloves, the white jewelled neckwear, the shining hat, the hardened and angry face beneath it—and then broke boisterously forth into a loud guffaw of contemptuous laughter.

When he had laughed his fill, he turned upon his heel without a word and walked away, carrying himself with proud erectness, and thumping his umbrella on the sidewalk with each step as he went.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LOCKOUT.

WHEN Thessaly awoke one morning some fortnight later, and rubbed its eyes, and, looking again, discovered in truth that everything outside was white, the recognition of the familiar visitor was followed by a sigh. The children still had a noisy friendliness of greeting for the snow, and got out their sleds and bored anticipatory holes in their boot-heels with a thrill of old-time enthusiasm; but even their delight became subdued in its manifestations before noon had arrived—their elders seemed to take the advent of winter so seriously.

Villagers, when they spoke to one another that morning, noted that the voice of the community had suddenly grown graver in tone and lower in pitch. The threat of the approaching season weighed with novel heaviness on the general mind.

For the first time since the place had begun its manufacturing career, Thessaly was idle. The Minister furnaces had been closed for more than two weeks; the mills of the Thessaly Manufacturing Company, for nearly that length of time. Half the bread-winners in the town were out of work and saw no prospect of present employment.

Usage is most of all advantageous in adversity. These artisans of Thessaly lacked experience in enforced idleness and the trick of making bricks without straw. Employment, regular and well requited, had become so much a matter of course that its sudden cessation now bewildered and angered them. Each day brought to their minds its fresh train of calamitous consequences. Children needed shoes; the flour-barrel was nearly empty; to lay in a pig for the winter might now be impossible. The question of rent quarter loomed black and menacing like a thunder-cloud on the horizon; and there were those with mortgages on their little homes, who already saw this cloud streaked with the lightning of impending tempest. Anxious housewives began to retrench at the grocer's and butcher's; but the saloons and tobacco shops had almost doubled their average of receipts.

Even on ordinary holidays the American workman, bitten as he is with the eager habitude of labor, more often than not some time during the day finds himself close to the place where at other times he is employed. There his thoughts are: thither his steps all unconsciously bend themselves. So now, in this melancholy, indefinite holiday which November had brought to Thessaly, the idlers instinctively hung about the deserted works. The tall, smokeless chimneys, the locked gates, the grimy windows—through which the huge dark forms of the motionless machines showed dimly, like the fossils of extinct monsters in a museum—the dreary stretches of cin-

der heaps and blackened waste which surrounded the silent buildings—all these had a cruel kind of fascination for the dispossessed toilers.

They came each day and stood lazily about in groups: they smoked in taciturnity, told sardonic stories, or discussed their grievance, each according to his mood; but they kept their eyes on the furnaces and mills whence wages came no more and where all was still. There was something in it akin in pathos to the visits a mother pays to the graveyard where her child lies hidden from sight under the grass and the flowers. It was the tomb of their daily avocation that these men came to look at✓

But, as time went on, there grew to be less and less of the pathetic in what these men thought and said. The sense of having been wronged swelled within them until there was room for nothing but wrath. In a general way they understood that a trust had done this thing to them. But that was too vague and far-off an object for specific cursing. The Minster women were nearer home, and it was quite clear that they were the beneficiaries of the trust's action. There were various stories told about the vast sum which these greedy women had been paid by the trust for shutting down their furnaces and stopping the output of iron ore from their fields, and as days succeeded one another this sum steadily magnified itself.

The Thessaly Manufacturing Company, which concerned a much larger number of workmen, stood on a somewhat different footing. Mechanics who knew

men who were friendly with Schuyler Tenney learned in a roundabout fashion that he really had been forced into closing the mills by the action of the Minster women. When you came to think of it, this seemed very plausible. Then the understanding sifted about among the men that the Minsters were, in reality, the chief owners of the Manufacturing Company, and that Tenney was only a business manager and minor partner, who had been overruled by these heartless women. All this did not make friends for Tenney. The lounging workmen on the street corners eyed him scowlingly when he went by, but their active hatred passed him over and concentrated itself upon the widow and daughters of Stephen Minster. On occasion now, when fresh rumors of the coming of French Canadian workmen were in the air, very sinister things were muttered about these women.

Before the lockout had been two days old, one of the State officers of a labor association had visited Thessaly, had addressed a hastily convened meeting of the ejected workmen, and had promised liberal assistance from the central organization. He had gone away again, but two or three subordinate officials of the body had appeared in town and were still there. They professed to be preparing detailed information upon which their chiefs could act intelligently. They had money in their pockets, and displayed a quite metropolitan freedom about spending it over the various bars. Some of the more conservative workmen thought these emissaries put in altogether too much time at these bars, but they were

evidently popular with the great bulk of the men. They had a large fund of encouraging reminiscence about the way bloated capitalists had been beaten and humbled and brought down to their knees elsewhere in the country, and they were evidently quite confident that the workers would win this fight, too. Just how it was to be won no one mentioned, but when the financial aid began to come in it would be time to talk about that. And when the French Canadians came, too, it would be time— The rest of this familiar sentence was always left unspoken, but lowering brows and significant nods told how it should be finished.

So completely did this great paralytic stroke to industry monopolize attention, that events in the village, not immediately connected with it, passed almost unnoticed. Nobody gave a second thought, for example, to the dissolution of the law firm of Tracy & Boyce, much less dreamed of linking it in any way with the grand industrial drama which engaged public interest.

Horace, at the same time, took rooms at the new brick hotel, the Central, which had been built near the railroad depot, and opened an office of his own a block or two lower down Main Street than the one he had vacated. This did not attract any special comment, and when, on the evening of the 16th of November, a meeting of the Thessaly Citizens' Club was convened, fully half those who attended learned there for the first time that the two young lawyers had separated.

The club at last had secured a building for itself—or rather the refusal of one—and this meeting was called to decide upon ratifying the purchase. It was held in a large upper room of the building under discussion, which had been the gymnasium of a German Turn Verein, and still had stowed away in its corners some of the apparatus that the athletes had used.

When Horace, as president, called the gathering to order, there were some forty men present, representing very fairly the business and professional classes of the village. Schuyler Tenney was there as one of the newer members; and Reuben Tracy, with John Fairchild, Dr. Lester, Father Chance, and others of the founders, sat near one another farther back in the hall.

The president, with ready facility, laid before the meeting the business at hand. The building they were in could be purchased, or rented on a reasonably extended lease. It seemed to the committee better to take it than to think of erecting one for themselves—at least for the present. So much money would be needed: so much for furniture, so much for repairs, etc.; so much for heating and lighting, so much for service, and so on—a very compact and lucid statement, indeed.

A half hour was passed in more or less inconclusive discussion before Reuben Tracy rose to his feet and began to speak. The story that he and Boyce were no longer friends had gone the round of the room, and some men turned their chairs to give him

the closer attention with eye and ear. Before long all were listening with deep interest to every word.

Reuben started by saying that there was something even more important than the question of the new building, and that was the question of what the club itself meant. In its inception, the idea of creating machinery for municipal improvement had been foremost. Certainly he and those associated with him in projecting the original meeting had taken that view of their work. That meeting had contented itself with an indefinite expression of good intentions, but still had not dissented from the idea that the club was to mean something and to do something. Now it became necessary, before final steps were taken, to ask what that something was to be. So far as he gathered, much thought had been given as to the probable receipts and expenditure, as to where the card-room, the billiard-room, the lunch-room, and so forth should be located, and as to the adoption of all modern facilities for making themselves comfortable in their new club-house. But about the original objects of the club he had not heard a syllable. To him this attitude was profoundly unsatisfactory. At the present moment, the village was laboring under a heavy load of trouble and anxiety. Nearly if not quite a thousand families were painfully affected by the abrupt stoppage of the two largest works in the section. If actual want was not already experienced, at least the vivid threat of it hung over their poorer neighbors all about them. This fact, it seemed to him,

must appeal to them all much more than any conceivable suggestion about furnishing a place in which they might sit about at their ease in leisure hours. He put it to the citizens before him, that their way was made exceptionally clear for them by this calamity which had overtaken their village. If the club meant anything, it must mean an organization to help these poor people who were suddenly, through no fault of their own, deprived of incomes and employment. That was something vital, pressing, urgent; easy-chairs and billiard-tables could wait, but the unemployed artisans of Thessaly and their families could not.

This in substance was what Reuben said; and when he had finished there succeeded a curious instant of dead silence, and then a loud confusion of comment. Half a dozen men were on their feet now, among them both Tenney and John Fairchild.

The hardware merchant spoke first, and what he said was not so prudent as those who knew him best might have expected. The novel excitement of speaking in public got into his head, and he not only used language like a more illiterate man than he really was, but he attacked Tracy personally for striving to foment trouble between capital and labor, and thereby created an unfavorable impression upon the minds of his listeners.

Editor Fairchild had ready a motion that the building be taken on a lease, but that a special committee be appointed by the meeting to devise means for using it to assist the men of Thessaly now out of

employment, and that until the present labor crisis was over, all questions of furnishing a club-house proper be laid on the table. He spoke vigorously in support of this measure, and when he had finished there was a significant round of applause.

Horace rose when order had been restored, and speaking with some hesitation, said that he would put the motion, and that if it were carried he would appoint such a committee, but—

"I said 'to be appointed by the meeting'!" called out John Fairchild, sharply.

The president did not finish his sentence, but sat down again, and Tenney pushed forward and whispered in his ear. Two or three others gathered sympathetically about, and then still others joined the group formed about the president, and discussed eagerly in undertones this new situation.

"I must decline to put the motion. It does not arise out of the report. It is out of order," answered Horace at last, as a result of this faction conference.

"Then I will put it myself," cried Fairchild, rising. "But I beg first to move that you leave the chair!"

Horace looked with angered uncertainty down upon the men who remained seated about Fairchild. They were as thirty to his ten, or thereabouts. He could not stand up against this majority. For a moment he had a fleeting notion of trying to conciliate it, and steer a middle course, but Tenney's presence had made that impossible. He laid down his gavel, and, gathering up his hat and coat, stepped off the platform to the floor.

"There is no need of moving that," he said. "I'll go without it. So far as I am concerned, the meeting is over, and the club doesn't exist."

He led the way out, followed by Tenney, Jones the match-manufacturer, the Rev. Dr. Turner, and five or six others. One or two gentlemen rose as if to join the procession, and then thinking better of it sat down again.

By general suggestion, John Fairchild took the chair thus vacated, but beyond approving the outlines of his plan, and appointing a committee with Tracy at its head to see what could be done to carry it out, the meeting found very little to do. It was agreed that this committee should also consider the question of funds, and should call a meeting when it was ready to report, which should be at the earliest possible date.

Then the meeting broke up, and its members dispersed, not without well-founded apprehensions that they had heard the last of the Thessaly Citizens' Club.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE ROBBER'S CAVE.

HORACE BOYCE was too enraged to preserve a polite demeanor toward the sympathizers who had followed him out of the hall, and who showed a disposition to discuss the situation with him now the street was reached. After a muttered word or two to Tenney, the young man abruptly turned his back on the group, and walked with a hurried step down the street toward his hotel.

Entering the building, he made his way direct to the bar-room back of the office—a place where he had rarely been before—and poured out for himself a heavy portion of whiskey, which he drank off without noticing the glass of iced water placed for him beside the bottle. He turned to go, but came back again to the bar after he had reached the swinging screen-doors, and said he would take a bottle of the liquor up to his room. "I haven't been sleeping well these last few nights," he explained to the bar-keeper.

Once in his room, Horace put off his boots, got into easy coat and slippers, raked down the fire, looked for an aimless minute or two at the row of books on his shelf, and then threw himself into the arm-chair beside the stove. The earlier suggestion

of gray in his hair at the temples had grown more marked these last few weeks, and there were new lines of care on his clear-cut face, which gave it a haggard look now as he bent his brows in rumination.

An important interview with Tenney and Wendover was to take place in this room a half hour later; but, besides a certain hard-drawn notion that he would briskly hold his own with them, Horace did not try to form plans for this or even to fasten his mind upon it.

The fortnight or more that had passed since that terrible momentary vision of Kate Minster running up the stairs to avoid him, had been to the young man a period of unexampled gloominess and unrest, full of deep wrath at the fate which had played upon him such a group of scurvy tricks all at once, yet having room for sustained exasperation over the minor discomforts of his new condition.

The quarrel with his father had forced him to change his residence, and this was a peculiarly annoying circumstance coming at just such a time. He realized now that he had been very comfortable in the paternal house, and that his was a temperament extremely dependent upon well-ordered and satisfactory surroundings. These new rooms of his, though they cost a good deal of money, were not at all to his liking, and the service was execrable. The sense of being at home was wholly lacking; he felt as disconnected and out of touch with the life about him as if he had been travelling in a foreign country which he did not like.

The great humiliation and wrong—the fact that he had been rejected with open contumely by the rich girl he had planned to marry—lay steadily day and night upon the confines of his consciousness, like a huge black morass with danger signals hung upon all its borders. His perverse mind kept returning to view these menacing signals, and torturing him with threats to disregard them and plunge into the forbidden darkness. The constant strain to hold his thoughts back from this hateful abyss wore upon him like an unremitting physical pain.

The resolve which had chilled and stiffened him into self-possession that afternoon in the drawing-room, and had even enabled him to speak with cold distinctness to Mrs. Minster and to leave the house of insult and defeat with dignity, had been as formless and unshaped as poor, heart-torn, trembling Lear's threat to his daughters before Gloster's gate. Revenge he would have—sweeping, complete, merciless, but by what means he knew not. That would come later.

Two weeks were gone, and the revenge seemed measurably nearer, though still its paths were all unmapped. It was clear enough to the young man's mind now that Tenney and Wendover were intent on nothing less than plundering the whole Minster estate. Until that fatal afternoon in the drawing-room, he had kept himself surrounded with an elaborate system of self-deception. He had pretended to himself that the designs of these associates of his were merely smart commercial plans, which needed

only to be watched with equal smartness. Now the pretence was put aside. He knew the men to be villains, and openly rated them as such in his thoughts.

He had a stern satisfaction in the thought that their schemes were in his hands. He would join them now, frankly and with all his heart, only providing the condition that his share of the proceeds should be safe-guarded. They should have his help to wreck this insolent, purse-proud, newly rich family, to strip them remorselessly of their wealth. His fellow brigands might keep the furnaces, might keep everything in and about this stupid Thessaly. He would take his share in hard coin, and shake the mud and slush of Dearborn County from off his feet. He was only in the prime of his youth. Romance beckoned to him from a hundred centres of summer civilization, where men knew how to live, and girls added culture and dowries to beauty and artistic dress. Oh, yes! he would take his money and go.

The dream of a career in his native village had brought him delight only so long as Kate Minster was its central figure. That vision now seemed so clumsy and foolish that he laughed at it. He realized that he had never liked the people here about him. Even the Minsters had been provincial, only a gilded variation upon the rustic character of the section. Nothing but the over-sanguine folly of youth could ever have prompted him to think that he wanted to be mayor of Thessaly, or that it would be good to link his fortunes with the dull, under-bred

place. Oh, no! he would take his money and go.

The two men for whom he had been waiting broke abruptly in upon his revery by entering the room. They came in without even a show of knocking on the door, and Horace frowned a little at their rudeness.

Stout Judge Wendover panted heavily with the exertion of ascending the stairs, and it seemed to have put him out of temper as well as breath. He threw off his overcoat with an impatient jerk, took a chair, and gruffly grunted "How-de-do!" in the direction of his host, without taking the trouble to even nod a salutation. Tenney also seated himself, but he did not remove his overcoat. Even in the coldest seasons he seemed to wear the same light, autumnal clothes, creaseless and gray, and mouse-like in effect. The two men looked silently at Horace, and he felt that they disapproved his velveteen coat.

"Well?" he asked, at last, leaning back in his chair and trying to equal them in indifference. "What is new in New York, Judge?"

"Never mind New York! Thessaly is more in our line just now," said Wendover, sternly.

The young man simulated a slight yawn. "You're welcome to my share of the town, I'm sure," he said; "I'm not very enthusiastic about it myself."

"How much has Reuben Tracy got to work on? How much have you blabbed about our business to him?" asked the New Yorker.

"I neither know nor care anything about Mr.

Tracy," said Horace, coldly. "As for what you elegantly describe as my 'blabbing' to him, I daresay you understand what it means. I don't."

"It means that you have made a fool of us; got us into trouble; perhaps ruined the whole business, by your God A'mighty stupidity! That's what it means!" said Wendover, with his little blue-bead eyes snapping angrily in the lamplight.

"I hope it won't strike you as irrelevant if I suggest that this is my room," drawled Horace, "and that I have a distinct preference for civil conversation in it. If you have any criticisms to offer upon my conduct, as you seem to think that you have, I must beg that you couch them in the language which gentlemen—"

"Gentlemen be damned!" broke in the Judge, sharply. "We've had too much 'gentleman' in this whole business! Answer me a plain question. What does Tracy mean by his applications?"

"I haven't the remotest idea what you are talking about. I've already told you that I know nothing of Mr. Tracy or his doings."

Schuyler Tenney interposed, impassively: "He may not have heard of the application, Judge. You must remember that, for the sake of appearances, he then being in partnership, you were made Mrs. Minster's attorney, in both the agreements. That is how notices came to be served on you."

The Judge had not taken his eyes off the young man in the velveteen jacket. "Do you mean to tell me that you haven't learned from Mrs. Minster that

this man Tracy has made applications on behalf of the daughters to upset the trust agreement, and to have a receiver appointed to overhaul the books of the Mfg. Company?"

Horace sat up straight. "Good God, no!" he stammered. "I've heard nothing of that."

"You never do seem to hear about things. What did you suppose you were here for, except to watch Mrs. Minster, and keep track of what was going on?" demanded Wendover.

"I may tell you," answered Horace, speaking hesitatingly, "that circumstances have arisen which render it somewhat difficult for me to call upon Mrs. Minster at her house—for that matter, out of the question. She has only been to my office *once* within the—the last fortnight."

Schuyler Tenney spoke again. "The 'circumstances' means, Judge, that he—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Tenney," said Horace, with decision: "what the circumstances mean is neither your business nor that of your friend. That is something that we will not discuss, if you please."

"Won't we, though!" burst in Wendover, peremptorily. "You make a fool of us. You go sneaking around one of the girls up there. You think you'll set yourself in a tub of butter, and let our schemes go to the devil. You try to play this behind our backs. You get kicked out of the house for your impudence. And then you sit here, dressed like an Italian organ-grinder, by God, and tell me that we won't discuss the subject!"

Horace rose to his feet, with all his veins tingling. "You may leave this room, both of you," he said, in a voice which he with difficulty kept down. His face was pale with rage.

Judge Wendover rose, also, but it was not to obey Horace's command. Instead, he pointed imperiously to the chair which the young man had vacated.

"Sit down there," he shouted. "Sit down, I tell you! I warn you, I'm in no mood to be fooled with. You deserve to have your neck wrung for what you've done already. If I have another word of cheek from you, by God, it *shall* be wrung! We'll throw you on the dungheap as we would a dead rat."

Horace had begun to listen to these staccato sentences with his arms folded, and lofty defiance in his glance. Somehow, as he looked into his antagonist's blazing eyes, his courage melted before their hot menace. The pudgy figure of the Judge visibly magnified itself under his gaze, and the threat in that dry, husky voice set his nerves to quaking. He sank into his seat again.

"All right," he said, in an altered voice. "I'm willing enough to talk, only a man doesn't like to be bullied in that way in his own house."

"It's a tarnation sight better than being bullied by a warder in Auburn State's prison," said the Judge, as he too resumed his chair. "Take my word for that."

Schuyler Tenney crossed his legs nervously at this, and coughed. Horace looked at them both in a mystified but uneasy silence.

"You heard what I said?" queried Wendover, brusquely, after a moment's pause.

"Undoubtedly I did," answered Horace. "But—but its application escaped me."

"What I mean is"—the Judge hesitated for a moment to note Tenney's mute signal of dissuasion, and then went on: "We might as well not beat about the bush—what I mean is that there's a penitentiary job in this thing for somebody, unless we all keep our heads, and have good luck to boot. You've done your best to get us all into a hole, with your confounded airs and general foolishness. If worse comes to worst, perhaps we can save ourselves, but there won't be a ghost of a chance for you. I'll see to that myself. If we come to grief, you shall pay for it."

"What do you mean?" asked Horace, in a subdued tone, after a period of silent reflection. "Where does the penitentiary part come in?"

"I don't agree with the Judge at all," interposed Tenney, eagerly. "I don't think there's any need of looking on the dark side of the thing. We don't *know* that Tracy knows anything. And then, why shouldn't we be able to get our own man appointed receiver?"

"This is the situation," said Wendover, speaking deliberately. "You advised Mrs. Minster to borrow four hundred thousand dollars for the purchase of certain machinery patents, and you drew up the papers for the operation. It happens that she

already owned—or rather that the Mfg. Company already owned—these identical rights and patents. They were a part of the plant and business we put into the company at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars when we moved over from Cadmus. But nobody on her side, except old Clarke, knew just what it was that we put in. He died in Florida, and it was arranged that his papers should pass to you. There was no record that we had sold the right of the nail machine.”

Horace gazed with bewilderment into the hard-drawn, serious faces of the two men who sat across the little table from him. In the yellow lamp-light these countenances looked like masks, and he searched them in vain for any sign of astonishment or emotion. The thing which was now for the first time being put into words was strange, but as it shaped itself in his mind he did not find himself startled. It was as if he had always known about it, but had allowed it to lapse in his memory. These men were thieves—and he was their associate! The room with its central point of light where the three knaves were gathered, and its deepening shadows round about, suggested vaguely to him a robber’s cave. Primary instincts arose strong within him. Terror lest discovery should come yielded precedence to a fierce resolve to have a share of the booty. It seemed minutes to him before he spoke again.

“Then she was persuaded to mortgage her property, to buy over again at four times its value what

she had already purchased?" he asked, with an assumption of calmness.

"That seems to be about what you managed to induce her to do," said the Judge, dryly.

"Then you admit that it was I who did it—that you owe the success of the thing to me!" The young man could not restrain his eagerness to establish this point. He leaned over the table, and his eyes sparkled with premature triumph.

"No: I said '*seems*,' answered Wendover. "*We* know better. *We* know that from the start you have done nothing but swell around at our expense, and create as many difficulties for us and our business as possible. But the courts and the newspapers would look at it differently. *They* would be sure to regard you as the one chiefly responsible."

"I should think we were pretty much in the same boat, my friend," said Horace, coldly.

"I daresay," replied the New Yorker, "only with this difference: we can swim, and you can't. By that I mean, we've got money, and you haven't. See the point?"

Horace saw the point, and felt himself revolted at the naked selfishness and brutality with which it was exposed. The disheartening fact that these men would not hesitate for an instant to sacrifice him—that they did not like him, and would not lift a finger to help him unless it was necessary for their own salvation—rose gloomily before his mind.

"Still, it would be better for all of us that the boat shouldn't be capsized at all," he remarked.

"That's it—that's the point," put in Tenney, with animation; "that's what I said to the Judge."

"This Tracy of yours," said Wendover, "has got hold of the Minster girls. He's acting for them. He has been before Judge Waller with a whole batch of applications. First, in chambers, he's brought an action to dissolve the trust, and asked for an order returnable at Supreme Court chambers to show cause why, in the mean time, the furnaces shouldn't be opened. His grounds are, first, that the woman was deceived; and second, that the trust is against public policy. Now, it seems to me that our State courts can't issue an order binding on a board of directors at Pittsburg. Isn't it a thing that belongs to a United States court? How is that?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Horace. "It's a new question to me."

"Tenney told me you knew something as a lawyer," was Wendover's angry comment. "I'd like to know where it comes in."

The hardware merchant hastened to avert the threatened return to personalities. "Tell him about the receiver motion," he said.

"Then Tracy, before the same judge, but in special term, has applied for a receiver for the Thesaly Mfg. Company, on the ground of fraud."

"That's the meanest thing about the whole business," commented Tenney.

"Well, what do you advise doing?" asked Horace, despondently.

"There are two things," said Wendover. "First, to delay everything until after New Year, when Mrs. Minster's interest becomes due and can't be paid. That can be done by denying jurisdiction of the State court in the trust business, and by asking for particulars in the receiver matter. The next thing is to make Thessaly too hot for those women, and for Tracy, too, before New Year. If a mob should smash all the widow's windows for her, for instance, perhaps burn her stable, she'd be mighty glad to get out of town, and out of the iron business, too."

"But that wouldn't shut Tracy up," observed Tenney. "He sticks at things like a bull-dog, once he gets a good hold."

"I'm thinking about Tracy," mused the Judge.

Horace found himself regarding these two visitors of his with something like admiration. The resourcefulness and resolution of their villainy were really wonderful. He felt his courage coming back to him. Such men would be sure to win, if victory were not absolutely impossible. At least, there was nothing for it but to cordially throw in his lot with them.

"Whatever is decided upon, I'll do my share," he said, with decision. Upon reflection, he added: "But if I share the risks, I must be clearly understood to also share the profits."

Judge Wendover looked at the young man sternly, and breathed hard as he looked. "Upon my word," he growled at last, "you're the cheekiest young cub I've seen since before the war!"

Horace stood to his guns. "However that may be," he said, "you see what I mean. This is a highly opportune time, it strikes me, to discover just how I stand in this matter."

"You'll stand where you're put, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Surely," Schuyler Tenney interposed, "you ought to have confidence that we will do the fair thing."

"My bosom may be simply overflowing with confidence in you both"—Horace ventured upon a suggestion of irony in his intonation—"but experience seems to indicate the additional desirability of an understanding. If you will think it over, I daresay you will gather the force of my remark."

The New Yorker seemed not to have heard the remark, much less to have understood it. He addressed the middle space between Horace and Tenney in a meditative way: "Those two speech-making fellows who are here from the Amalgamated Confederation of Labor, or whatever it is, can both be had to kick up a row whenever we like. I know them both of old. They notified me that they were coming here ten days ago. We can tell them to keep their hands off the Canadians when they come next week, and lead their crowd instead up to the Minster house. We'll go over that together, Tenney, later on. But about Tracy—perhaps these fellows might—"

Wendover followed up the train of this thought in silence, with a ruminative eye on vacancy.

"What I was saying," insisted Horace, "was that I wanted to know just how I stand."

"I suppose it's out of the question to square Tracy," pursued Wendover, thinking aloud, "and that Judge Waller that he's applied to, he's just another such an impracticable cuss. There's no security for business at all, when such fellows have the power to muddle and interfere with it. Tenney, *you* know this Tracy. Why can't you think of something?"

"As I remarked before," Horace interposed once more, "what am I to get out of this thing?"

This time the New Yorker heard him. He slowly turned his round, white-framed face toward the speaker, and fixed upon him a penetrating glance of wrath, suspicion, and dislike.

"Oh, *that* is what you want to know, is it?" he said, abruptly, after a momentary silence. "Well, sir, if you had your deserts, you'd get about seven years' hard labor. As it is, you've had over seven thousand dollars out of the concern, and you've done seven hundred thousand dollars' worth of damage. If you can make a speech before Judge Waller this week that will stave off all these things until after New Year's, perhaps I may forgive you some of the annoyance and loss your infernal idiocy and self-conceit have caused us. When you've done that, it will be time enough to talk to me about giving you another chance to keep your salary. But understand this, sir! You never made a bigger mistake in your life than in thinking you could dictate terms

to Peter Wendover, now or any other time! Why, you poor empty-headed creature, who do you suppose *you* could frighten? You're as helpless as a June-bug in a cistern with the curb shut down."

The Judge had risen while speaking, and put on his overcoat. He took his hat now, and glanced to note that Tenney was also on his feet. Then he added these further words to the young man, whose head was drooping in spite of himself, and whose figure had sunk into a crouching posture in the easy-chair:

"Let me give you some advice. Take precious good care not to annoy me any more while this business is on. I never did take much stock in you. It was Tenney who picked you out, and who thought you could be useful. I didn't believe in you from the start. Now that I've summered and wintered you, I stand amazed, by God! that I could ever have let you get mixed up in my affairs. But here you are, and it will be easier for us to put up with you, and carry you along, than throw you out. Besides, you may be able to do some good, if what I've said puts any sense into your head. But don't run away with the idea that you are necessary to us, or that you are going to share anything, as you call it, or that you can so much as lift your finger against us without first of all crushing yourself. This is plain talk, and it may help you to size yourself up as you really are. According to your own notion of yourself, God Almighty's overcoat would have about made you a vest. My idee of you is different, you

see, and I'm a good deal nearer right than you are. I'll send the papers over to you to-morrow, and let us see what you will do with them."

The New York magnate turned on his heel at this, and, without any word of adieu, he and Tenney left the room.

Horace sat until long after midnight in his chair, with the bottle before him, half-dazed and overwhelmed amidst the shapeless ruins of his ambition.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MISTS CLEARING AWAY.

REUBEN TRACY rose at an unwontedly early hour next morning, under the spur of consciousness that he had a very busy day before him. While he was still at his breakfast in the hotel dining-room, John Fairchild came to keep an appointment made the previous evening, and the two men were out on the streets together before Thessaly seemed wholly awake.

Their first visit was to the owner of the building which the Citizens' Club had thought of hiring, and their business here was promptly despatched; thence they made their way to the house of a boss-carpenter, and within the hour they had called upon a plumber, a painter, and one or two other master artisans. By ten o'clock those of this number with whom arrangements had been made had put in an appearance at the building in question, and Tracy and Fairchild explained to them the plans which they were to carry out. The discussion and settlement of these consumed the time until noon, when the lawyer and the editor separated, and Reuben went to his office.

Here, as had been arranged, he found old 'Squire Gedney waiting for him. A long interview behind

the closed door of the inner office followed, and when the two men came out the justice of the peace was putting a roll of bills into his pocket.

"This is Tuesday," he said to Tracy. "I daresay I can be back by Thursday. The bother about it is that Cadmus is such an out-of-the-way place to get at."

"At all events, I'll count on seeing you Friday morning," answered Reuben. "Then, if you've got what I expect, we can go before the county judge and get our warrants by Saturday, and that will be in plenty of time for the grand jury next week."

"If they don't all eat their Christmas dinner in Auburn prison, call me a Dutchman!" was Gedney's confident remark, as he took his departure.

Reuben, thus left alone, walked up and down the larger room in pleased excitement, his hands in his pockets and his eyes aglow with satisfaction. So all-pervasive was his delight that it impelled him to song, and he hummed to himself as he paced the floor a faulty recollection of a tune his mother had been fond of, many years before. Reuben had no memory for music, and knew neither the words nor the air, but no winged outburst of exultation from a triumphant Viking in the opera could have reflected a more jubilant mood.

He had unearthed the conspiracy, seized upon its avenues of escape, laboriously traced all its subterranean burrowings. Even without the proof which it was to be hoped that Gedney could bring from Cadmus, Reuben believed he had information

enough to justify criminal proceedings. Nothing could be clearer than guilty collusion between this New Yorker, Wendover, and some of the heads of the pig-iron trust to rob Mrs. Minster and her daughters. At almost every turn and corner in the ramification of the huge swindle, Tenney and Boyce also appeared. They too should not escape. Reuben Tracy was the softest-hearted of men, but it did not occur to him to relent when he thought of his late partner. To the contrary, there was a decided pleasure in the reflection that nothing could avert well-merited punishment from this particular young man.

The triumph had its splendid public side, moreover. Great and lasting good must follow such an exposure as he would make of the economic and social evils underlying the system of trusts. A staggering blow would be dealt to the system, and to the sentiment back of it that rich men might do what they liked in America. With pardonable pride he thrilled at the thought that his arm was to strike this blow. The effect would be felt all over the country. It could not but affect public opinion, too, on the subject of the tariff—that bomb-proof cover under which these men had conducted their knavish operations. Reuben sang with increased fervor as this passed through his mind.

On his way back from luncheon—which he still thought of as dinner—Reuben Tracy stopped for a few moments at the building he and Fairchild had rented. The carpenters were already at work,

ripping down the partitions on the ground floor, in a choking and clamorous confusion of dust and sound of hammering. The visible energy of these workmen and the noise they made were like a sympathetic continuation of his song of success. He would have enjoyed staying for hours, watching and listening to these proofs that he at last was doing something to help move the world around.

When he came out upon the street again, it was to turn his steps to the house of the Minsters. He had not been there since his visit in March, and there was a certain embarrassment about his going now. It was really Mrs. Minster's house, and he had been put in the position of acting against her, as counsel for her daughters. It was therefore a somewhat delicate business. But Miss Kate had asked him to come, and he would be sincerely glad of the opportunity of telling Mrs. Minster the whole truth, if she would listen to it. Just what form this opportunity might take he could not foresee ; but his duty was so clear, and his arguments must carry such absolute conviction, that he approached the ordeal with a light heart.

Miss Kate came down into the drawing-room to receive him, and Reuben noted with a deep joy that she again wore the loose robe of creamy cloth, girdled by that same enchanted rope of shining white silk. Something made him feel, too, that she observed the pleased glance of recognition he bestowed upon her garments, and understood it, and was not vexed. Their relations had been distinctly cordial—even

confidential—for the past fortnight; but the reappearance of this sanctified and symbolical gown—this mystical robe which he had enshrined in his heart with incense and candles and solemn veneration, as does the Latin devotee with the jewelled dress of the Bambino—seemed of itself to establish a far more tender intimacy between them. He became conscious, all at once, that she knew of his love.

“I have asked mamma to see you,” she said, when they were seated, “and I think she will. Since it was first suggested to her, she has wavered a good deal, sometimes consenting, sometimes not. The poor lady is almost distracted with the trouble in which we have all become involved, and that makes it all the more difficult for her to see things in their proper connection. I hope you may be able to show her just how matters stand, and who her real friends are.”

The girl left at this, and in a few moments reappeared with her mother, to whom she formally presented Mr. Tracy.

If Mrs. Minster had suffered great mental anguish since the troubles came on, her countenance gave no hint of the fact. It was as regular and imperturbable and deceptively impressive as ever, and she bore herself with perfect self-possession, bowing with frosty precision, and seating herself in silence.

Reuben himself began the talk by explaining that the steps which he had felt himself compelled to

take in the interest of the daughters implied not the slightest hostility to the mother. They had had, in fact, the ultimate aim of helping her as well. He had satisfied himself that she was in the clutch of a criminal conspiracy to despoil her estate and that of her daughters. It was absolutely necessary to act with promptness, and, as he was not her lawyer, to temporarily and technically separate the interest of her daughters from her own, for legal purposes. All that had been done was, however, quite as much to her advantage as to that of her daughters, and when he had explained to her the entire situation he felt sure she would be willing to allow him to represent her as well as her daughters in the effort to protect the property and defeat the conspiracy.

Mrs. Minster offered no comment upon this expression of confidence, and Reuben went on to lay before her the whole history of the case. He did this with great clearness—as if he had been talking to a child—pointing out to her how the scheme of plunder originated, where its first operations revealed themselves, and what part in turn each of the three conspirators had played.

She listened to it all with an expressionless face, and though she must have been startled and shocked by a good deal of it, Reuben could gather no indication from her manner of her feelings or her opinions. When he had finished, and his continued silence rendered it clear that he was not going to say any more, she made her first remark.

“I’m much obliged to you, I’m sure,” she said,

with no sign of emotion. "It was very kind of you to explain it to me. But of course *they* explain it quite differently."

"No doubt," answered Reuben. "That is just what they would do. The difference is that they have lied to you, and that I have told you what the books, what the proofs, really show."

"I have known Peter Wendover since we were children together," she said, after a momentary pause, "and *he* never would have advised my daughters to sue their own mother!"

Reuben suppressed a groan. "Nobody has sued you, Mrs. Minster; least of all, your daughters," he tried to explain. "The actions I have brought—that is, including the applications—are directed against the men who have combined to swindle you, not at all against you. They might just as well have been brought in your name also, only that I had no power to act for you."

"It is the same as suing me. Judge Wendover said so," was her reply.

"What I seek to have you realize is that Judge Wendover purposely misleads you. He is the head and front of the conspiracy to rob you. I am going to have him indicted for it. The proofs are as plain as a pikestaff. How, then, can you continue to believe what he tells you?"

"I quite believe that you mean well, Mr. Tracy," said Mrs. Minster. "But lawyers, you know, always take opposite sides. One lawyer tells you one thing; then the other swears to precisely the contrary."

Don't think I blame them. Of course they have to do it. But you know what I mean."

A little more of this hopeless conversation ensued, and then Mrs. Minster rose. "Don't let me drive you away, Mr. Tracy," she said, as he too got upon his feet. "But if you will excuse me—I've had so much worry lately—and these headaches come on every afternoon now."

As Reuben walked beside her to open the door, he ventured to say: "It is a very dear wish of mine, Mrs. Minster, to remove all this cause for worry, and to get you back control over your property, and to rid you of these scoundrels, root and branch. For your own sake and that of your daughters, let me beg of you to take no step that will embarrass me in the fight. There is nothing that you could do now to specially help me, except to do nothing at all."

"If you mean for me not to sue my daughters," she said, as he opened the door, "you may rest easy. Nothing would tempt me to do *that*! The very idea of such a thing is too dreadful. Good-day, sir."

Reuben this time did not repress the groan, after he had closed the door upon Mrs. Minster. He realized that he had made no more impression on her mind than ordnance practice makes on a sand-bank. He did not attempt to conceal his dejection as he returned to where Kate sat, and resumed his chair in front of her. The daughter's smiling face, however, partially reassured him.

"That's mamma all over," she said. "Isn't it wonderful how those old race types reappear, even in our day? She is as Dutch as any lady of Haarlem that Franz Hals ever painted. Her mind works sidewise, like a crab. I'm so glad you told her everything!"

"If I could only feel that it had had any result," said Reuben.

"Oh, but it will have!" the girl insisted confidently. "I'm sure she liked you very much."

"That reminds me—" the lawyer spoke musingly—"I think I was told once that she didn't like me; that she stipulated that I was not to be consulted about her business by—by my then partner. I wonder why that was. Do you know?"

"I have an idea," said Kate. Then she stopped, and a delicate shadowy flush passed over her face. "But it was nothing," she added, hastily, after a long pause. She could not bring herself to mention that year-old foolish gossip about the Lawton girl.

Reuben did not press for an answer, but began telling her about the work he and Fairchild had inaugurated that morning. "We are not going to wait for the committee," he said. "The place can be in some sort of shape within a week, I hope, and then we are going to open it as a reading-room first of all, where every man of the village who behaves himself can be free to come. There will be tea and coffee at low prices; and if the lockout continues, I've got plans for something else—a kind of

soup-kitchen. We sha'n't attempt to put the thing on a business basis at all until the men have got to work again. Then we will leave it to them, as to how they will support it, and what shall be done with the other rooms. By the way, I haven't seen much lately of the Lawton girl's project. I've heard vaguely that a start had been made, and that it seemed to work well. Are you pleased with it?"

Kate answered in a low voice: "I have never been there but once since we met there last winter. I did what I promised, in the way of assistance, but I did not go again. I too have heard vaguely that it was a success."

Reuben looked such obvious inquiry that that young lady felt impelled to explain: "The very next day after I went there last with the money and the plan, I heard some very painful things about the girl—about her present life, I mean—from a friend, or rather from one whom I took then to be a friend; and what he said prejudiced me, I suppose—"

A swift intuition helped Reuben to say: "By a 'friend' you mean Horace Boyce!"

Kate nodded her head in assent. As for Reuben, he rose abruptly from his seat, motioning to his companion to keep her chair. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and began pacing up and down along the edge of the sofa at her side, frowning at the carpet.

"Miss Kate," he said at last, in a voice full of strong feeling, "there is no possibility of my

telling you what an infernal blackguard that man is."

"Yes, he has behaved very badly," she said. "I suppose I am to blame for having listened to him at all. But he had seen me there at her place, through the glass door, and he seemed so anxious to keep me from being imposed upon, and possibly compromised, that—"

"My dear young lady," broke in Reuben, "you have no earthly idea of the cruelty and meanness of what he did by saying that to you. I can't—or yes, why shouldn't I? The fact is that that poor girl—and when she was at my school she was as honest and good and clever a child as I ever saw in my life—owed her whole misery and wretchedness to Horace Boyce. I never dreamed of it, either at the time or later; in fact, until the very day I met you at the milliner's shop. Somehow I mentioned that he was my partner, and then she told me. And then, knowing that, I had to sit still all summer and see him coming here every day, on intimate terms with you and your sister and mother." Reuben stopped himself with the timely recollection that this was an unauthorized emotion, and added hurriedly: "But I never could have imagined such baseness, to deliberately slander her to you!"

Kate did not at once reply, and when she did speak it was to turn the talk away from Horace Boyce. "I will go and see her to-morrow," she said.

"I am very glad to hear you say that," was Reu-

ben's comment. "It is like you to say it," he went on, with brightening eyes. "It is a benediction to be the friend of a young woman like you, who has no impulses that are not generous, and whose only notion of power is to help others."

"I shall not like you if you begin to flatter," she replied, with mock austerity, and an answering light in her eyes. "I am really a very perverse and wrong-headed girl, distinguished only for having never done any good at all. And anybody who says otherwise is not a friend, but a flatterer, and I am weary of false tongues."

Miss Ethel came in while Reuben was still turning over in his mind the unexpressed meanings of these words, and with her entrance the talk became general once more.

The lawyer described to the two sisters the legal steps he had taken, and their respective significance, and then spoke of his intention to make a criminal complaint as soon as some additional proof, now being sought, should come to hand.

Ethel clapped her hands. "And Horace Boyce will go to prison, then?" she asked, eagerly.

"There is a strong case against him," answered Reuben.

The graveness of his tone affected the girl's spirits, and led her to say in an altered voice: "I don't want to be unkind, and I daresay I shall be silly enough to cry in private if the thing really happens; but when I think of the trouble and wickedness he has been responsible for, and of the far more terrible

mischief he might have wrought in this family if I—that is, if *we* had not come to you as we did, I simply *hate* him.”

“Don’t let us talk about him any more, puss,” said Kate, soberly, rising as she spoke.

CHAPTER XXX.

JESSICA'S GREAT DESPAIR.

IT was on the following day that a less important member of society than Miss Minster resolved to also pay a visit to the milliner's shop.

Ben Lawton's second wife—for she herself scarcely thought of "Mrs. Lawton" as a title appertaining to her condition of ill-requited servitude—had become possessed of some new clothes. Their monetary value was not large, but they were warm and respectable, with bugle trimming on the cloak, and a feather rising out of real velvet on the bonnet; and they were new all together at the same time, a fact which impressed her mind by its novelty even more than did the inherent charm of acquisition.

To go out in this splendid apparel was an obvious duty. Where to go was less clear. The notion of going shopping loomed in the background of Mrs. Lawton's thoughts for a while, but in a formless and indistinct way, and then disappeared again. Her mind was not civilized enough to assimilate the idea of loitering around among the stores when she had no money with which to buy anything.

Gradually the conception of a visit to her step-daughter Jessica took shape in her imagination.

Perhaps the fact that she owed her new clothes to the bounty of this girl helped forward this decision. There was also a certain curiosity to see the child who was Ben's grandson, and so indirectly related to her, and for whose anomalous existence there was more than one precedent in her own family, and who might turn out to resemble her own little lost Alonzo. But the consideration which primarily dictated her choice was that there was no other place to go to.

Her reception by Jessica, when she finally found her way by Samantha's complicated directions to the shop, was satisfactorily cordial. She was allowed to linger for a time in the show-room, and satiate bewilderment over the rich plumes and multi-colored velvets and ribbons there displayed; then she was taken into the domestic part of the building, where she was asked like a real visitor to take off her cloak and bonnet, and sat down to enjoy the unheard-of luxury of seeing somebody else getting a "meal of victuals" ready. The child was playing by himself back of the stove with some blocks. He seemed to take no interest in his new relation, and Mrs. Lawton saw that if Alonzo had lived he would not have looked like this boy, who was blonde and delicate, with serious eyes and flaxen curls, and a high, rather protuberant forehead.

The brevet grandmother heard with surprise from Lucinda that this five-year-old child already knew most of his letters. She stole furtive glances at him after this, from time to time, and as soon as Jessica

had gone out into the store and closed the door she asked :

"Don't his head look to you like water on the brain?"

Lucinda shook her head emphatically: "He's healthy enough," she said.

"And his name's Horace, you say?"

"Yes, that's what I said," replied the girl.

Mrs. Lawton burned to ask what other name the lad bore, but the peremptory tones of her daughter warned her off. Instead she remarked: "And so he's been livin' in Tecumseh all this while? They seem to have brung him up pretty good—teachin' him his A B C's and curlin' his hair."

"He had a good home. Jess paid high, and the people took a liking to him," said Lucinda.

"I s'pose they died or broke up housekeepin'," tentatively suggested Mrs. Lawton.

"No: Jess wanted him here, or thought she did." Lucinda's loyalty to her sister prompted her to stop the explanation at this. But she herself had been sorely puzzled and tried by the change which had come over the little household since the night of the boy's arrival, and the temptation to put something of this into words was too strong to be mastered.

"I wish myself he hadn't come at all," she continued from the table where she was at work. "Not but that he's a good enough young-one, and lots of company for us both, but Jess ain't been herself at all since she brought him here. It ain't his fault—poor

little chap—but she fetched him from Tecumseh on account of something special ; and then that something didn't seem to come off, and she's as blue as a whetstone about it, and that makes everything blue. And there we are !”

Lucinda finished in a sigh, and proceeded to rub grease on the inside of her cake tins with a gloomy air.

In the outer shop, Jessica found herself standing surprised and silent before the sudden apparition of a visitor whom she had least of all expected—Miss Kate Minster.

The bell which formerly jangled when the street door opened had been taken off because it interfered with the child's mid-day sleep, and Jessica herself had been so deeply lost in a brown study where she sat sewing behind the counter that she had not noted the entrance of the young lady until she stood almost within touch. Then she rose hurriedly, and stood confused and tongue-tied, her work in hand. She dropped this impediment when Miss Minster offered to shake hands with her, but even this friendly greeting did not serve to restore her self-command or induce a smile.

“I have a thousand apologies to make for leaving you alone all this while,” said Kate. “But—we have been so troubled of late—and, selfish like, I have forgotten everything else. Or no—I won't say that—for I have thought a great deal about you and your work. And now you must tell me all about both.”

Miss Minster had seated herself as she spoke, and loosened the boa about her throat, but Jessica remained standing. She idly noted that no equipage and coachman were in waiting outside, and let the comment drift to her tongue. "You walked, I see," she said.

"Yes," replied Kate. "It isn't pleasant to take out the horses now. The streets are full of men out of work, and they blame us for it, and to see us drive about seems to make them angry. I suppose it's a natural enough feeling; but the boys pelted our coachman with snowballs the other day, while my sister and I were driving, and the men on the corner all laughed and encouraged them. But if I walk nobody molests me."

The young lady, as she said this with an air of modest courage, had never looked so beautiful before in Jessica's eyes, or appealed so powerfully to her liking and admiration. But the milliner was conscious of an invasion of other and rival feelings which kept her face smileless and hardened the tone of her voice.

"Yes, the men feel very bitterly," she said. "I know that from the girls. A good many of them—pretty nearly all, for that matter—have stopped coming here, since the lockout, because *your* money furnished the Resting House. That shows how strong the feeling is."

"You amaze me!"

There was no pretence in Miss Kate's emotion. She looked at Jessica with wide-open eyes, and the

astonishment in the gaze visibly softened and saddened into genuine pain. "Oh, I *am* so sorry!" she said. "I never thought of *that*. Tell me—what can be done? How can we get that cruel notion out of their heads? I did so *truly* want to help the girls. Surely there must be some way of making them realize this. The closing of the works, that is a business matter with which I had nothing to do, and which I didn't approve; but this plan of yours, *that* was really a pet of mine. It is only by a stupid accident that I did not come here often, and get to know the girls, and show them how interested I was in everything. When Mr. Tracy spoke of you yesterday, I resolved to come at once, and tell you how ashamed I was."

Jessica's heart was deeply stirred by this speech, and filled with yearnings of tenderness toward the beautiful and good patrician. But some strange, undefined force in her mind held all this softness in subjection.

"The girls are gone," she said, almost coldly. "They will not come back—at least for a long time, until all this trouble is forgotten."

"They hate me too much," groaned Kate, in grieved self-abasement.

"They don't know *you*! What they think of is that it is the Minster money; that is what they hate. To take away from the men with a shovel, and give back to the girls with a spoon—they won't stand that!" The latent class-feeling of a factory town flamed up in Jessica's bosom, intolerant and vengeful,

as she listened to her own words. "I would feel like that myself, if I were in their place," she said, in curt conclusion.

The daughter of the millions sat for a little in pained irresolution. She was conscious of impulses toward anger at the coldness, almost the rudeness, of this girl whom she had gone far out of and beneath her way to assist. Her own class-feeling, too, subtly prompted her to dismiss with contempt the thought of these thick-fingered, uncouth factory-girls who were rejecting her well-meant bounty. But kindlier feelings strove within her mind, too, and kept her for the moment undecided.

She looked up at Jessica, as if in search for help, and her woman's heart suddenly told her that the changes in the girl's face, vaguely apparent to her before, were the badges of grief and unrest. All the annoyance she had been nursing fled on the instant. Her eyes moistened, and she laid her hand softly on the other's arm.

"*You* at least mustn't think harshly of me," she said with a smile. "That would be *too* sad. I would give a great deal if the furnaces could be opened to-morrow—if they had never been shut. Not even the girls whose people are out of work feel more deeply about the thing than I do. But—after all, time must soon set that right. Tell me about yourself. You are not looking well. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

An answering moisture came into Jessica's eyes as she met the other's look. She shook her head, and

withdrew her wrist from the kindly pressure of Kate's hand.

"I spoke of you at length with Mr. Tracy," Kate went on, gently. "*Do* believe that we are both anxious to do all we can for you, in whatever form you like. You have never spoken about more money for the Resting House. Isn't your store about exhausted? If it is, don't hesitate for a moment to let me know. And mayn't I go and see the house, now that I am here? You know I have never been inside it once since you took it."

For a second or two Jessica hesitated. It cost her a great deal to maintain the unfriendly attitude she had taken up, and she was hopelessly at sea as to why she was paying this price for unalloyed unhappiness. Yet still she persisted doggedly, and as it were in spite of herself.

"It's a good deal run down just now," she said. "Since the trouble came, Lucinda and I haven't kept it up. You'd like better to see it some time when it was in order; that is, if I—if it isn't given up altogether!"

The despairing intonation of these closing words was not lost upon Kate. She looked up quickly.

"Why do you speak like that?" she said. "Are you discouraged, Jessica? Oh, I hope it isn't as bad as that!"

"I'm thinking a good deal of going away. You and Miss Wilcox can put somebody else here, and keep open the house. It doesn't need me. My heart isn't in it any more."

The girl forced herself through these words with a mournful effort. The hot tears came to her eyes before she had finished, and she turned away abruptly, walking behind the counter to the front of the shop.

Miss Minster rose and went to her. "There is something you are not telling me, my child," she urged with tender earnestness. "What is it? Are you in trouble? Tell me. *Let* me help you!"

"There is nothing—nothing at all," Jessica made answer. "Only I am not happy here. It was a mistake to come. And there are—other things—that were a mistake, too."

"Why not confide in me, dear? Why not let me help you?"

"How could *you* help me?" The girl spoke with momentary impatience. "There are things that *money* can't help."

The rich young lady drew herself up instinctively, and tightened the fur about her neck. The words affected her almost like an affront.

"I'm very sorry," she said, with an obvious cooling of manner. "I did not mean money alone. I had hoped you felt I was your friend. And I still want to be, if occasion arises. I shall be very much grieved, indeed, if you do not let me know, at any and all times, when I can be of use to you."

She held out her hand, evidently as an indication that she was going. Jessica saw the hand through a mist of smarting tears, and took it, not daring to look up. She was filled with longings to kiss this

hand, to cry out for forgiveness, to cast herself upon the soft shelter of this sweet friendship, so sweetly proffered. But there was some strange spell which held her back, and, still through the aching film of tears, she saw the gloved hand withdrawn. A soft "good-by" spread its pathos upon the silence about her, and then Miss Minster was gone.

Jessica stood for a time, looking blankly into the street. Then she turned and walked with unconscious directness, as in a dream, through the back rooms and across the yard to the Resting House. She had passed her stepmother, her sister, and her child without bestowing a glance upon them, and she wandered now through the silent building aimlessly, without power to think of what she saw. Although the furniture was still of the most primitive and unpretentious sort, there were many little appliances for the comfort of the girls, in which she had had much innocent delight. The bath-rooms on the upper floor, the willow rocking-chairs in the sitting-room, the neat row of cups and saucers in the glass-faced cupboard, the magazines and pattern books on the table—all these it had given her pleasure to contemplate only a fortnight ago. Now they were nothing to her. She noted that the fire in the base-burner had gone out, though the reservoir still seemed full of coal. She was conscious of a vague sense of fitness in its having gone out. The fire that had burned within her heart was in ashes, too. She put her apron to her eyes and wept vehemently, here in solitude.

Lucinda came out, nearly an hour later, to find her sister sitting disconsolate by the fireless stove, shivering with the cold, and staring into vacancy.

She put her broad arm with maternal kindness around Jessica's waist, and led her unresisting toward the door. "Never mind, sis," she murmured, with clumsy sympathy. "Come in and play with Horace."

Jessica, shuddering again with the chill, buried her face on her sister's shoulder, and wept supinely. There was not an atom of courage remaining in her heart.

"You are low down and miserable," pursued Lucinda, compassionately. "I'll make you up some boneset tea. It'll be lucky if you haven't caught your death a-cold out here so long." She had taken a shawl, which hung in the hallway, and wrapped it about her sister's shoulders.

"I half wish I had," sobbed Jessica. "There's no fight left in me any more."

"What's the matter, anyway?"

"If I knew myself," the girl groaned in answer, "perhaps I could do something; but I don't. I can't think, I can't eat or sleep or work. O God! what *is* the matter with me?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

A SOMBRE excitement reigned in Thessaly next day, when it became known that the French-Canadian workmen whom the rolling-mill people were importing would arrive in the village within the next few hours. They were coming through from Massachusetts, and watchful eyes at Troy had noted their temporary halt there and the time of the train they took westward. The telegraph sped forward the warning, and fully a thousand idle men in Thessaly gathered about the dépôt, both inside and on the street without, to witness the unwelcome advent.

Some indefinite rumors of the sensation reached the secluded milliner's shop on the back street, during the day. Ben Lawton drifted in to warm himself during the late forenoon, and told of the stirring scenes that were expected. He was quick to observe that Jessica was not looking well, and adjured her to be careful about the heavy cold which she said she had taken. The claims upon him of the excitement outside were too strong to be resisted, but he promised to look in during the afternoon and tell them the news.

The daylight of the November afternoon was be-

ginning imperceptibly to wane before any further tidings of the one topic of great public interest reached the sisters. One of the better class of factory-girls came in to gossip with Lucinda, and she brought with her a veritable budget of information. The French Canadians had arrived, and with them came some Pinkerton detectives, or whatever they were called, who were said to be armed to the teeth. The crowd had fiercely hooted these newcomers and their guards, and there had been a good deal of angry hustling. For awhile it looked as if a fight must ensue; but, somehow, it did not come off. The Canadians, in a body, had gone with their escort to the row of new cottages which the company had hired for them, followed by a diminishing throng of hostile men and boys. There were numerous personal incidents to relate, and the two sisters listened with deep interest to the whole recital.

When it was finished the girl still sat about, evidently with something on her mind. At last, with a blunt "Can I speak to you for a moment?" she led Jessica out into the shop. There, in a whisper, with repeated affirmations and much detail, she imparted the confidential portion of her intelligence.

The effect of this information upon Jessica was marked and immediate. As soon as the girl had gone she hastened to the living-room, and began hurriedly putting on her boots. The effort of stooping to button them made her feverish head ache, and she was forced to call the amazed Lucinda to her assistance.

"You're crazy to think of going out such a day as this," protested the girl, "and you with such a cold, too."

"It's got to be done," said Jessica, her eyes burning with eagerness, and her cheeks flushed. "If it killed me, it would have to be done. But I'll bundle up warm. Don't worry about me. I'll be all right."

Refusing to listen to further dissuasion she hastily put on her hat and cloak, and then with nervous rapidity wrote a note, sealed it up tightly with an envelope, and marked on it, with great plainness, the address: "Miss Kate Minster."

"Give this to father when he comes," she cried, "and tell him—"

Ben Lawton's appearance at the door interrupted the directions. He was too excited about the events of the day to be surprised at seeing the daughter he had left an invalid now dressed for the street; but she curtly stopped the narrative which he began.

"We've heard all about it," she said. "I want you to come with me now."

Lucinda watched the dominant sister drag on and button her gloves with apprehension and solicitude written all over her honest face. "Now, do be careful," she repeated more than once.

As Jessica said "I'm ready now," and turned to join her father, the little boy came into the shop through the open door of the living-room. A swift instinct prompted the mother to go to him and stoop to kiss him on the forehead. The child smiled at her; and when she was out in the street, walking so

hurriedly that her father found the gait unprecedented in his languid experience, she still dwelt curiously in her mind upon the sweetness of that infantile smile.

And this, by some strange process, suddenly brought clearness and order to her thoughts. Under the stress of this nervous tension, perhaps because of the illness which she felt in every bone, yet which seemed to clarify her senses, her mind was all at once working without confusion.

She saw now that what had depressed her, overthrown her self-control, impelled her to reject the kindness of Miss Minster, had been the humanization, so to speak, of her ideal, Reuben Tracy. The bare thought of his marrying and giving in marriage—of his being in love with the rich girl—this it was that had so strangely disturbed her. Looking at it now, it was the most foolish thing in the world. What on earth had she to do with Reuben Tracy? There could never conceivably have entered her head even the most vagrant and transient notion that he—no, she would not put *that* thought into form, even in her own mind. And were there two young people in all the world who had more claim to her good wishes than Reuben and Kate? She answered this heartily in the negative, and said to herself that she truly was glad that they loved each other. Yes, she was glad! She bit her lips, and insisted on repeating this to her own thoughts.

But why, then, had the discovery of this so unnerved her? She answered the question only

vaguely. It must have been because the idea of their happiness made the isolation of her own life so miserably clear; because she felt that they had forgotten her and her work in their new-found concern for each other. Yes, that would be the reason. She was all over that weak folly now. She had it in her power to help them, and dim, half-formed wishes that she might give life itself to their service flitted across her mind.

She had spoken never a word to her father all this while, and had seemed to take no note either of direction or of what and whom she passed; but she stopped now in front of the doorway in Main Street which bore the law-sign of Reuben Tracy. "Wait for me here," she said to Ben, and disappeared up the staircase.

Jessica made her way with some difficulty up the second flight. Her head burned with the exertion, and there was a novel numbness in her limbs; but she gave this only a passing thought.

The door of the office was locked. On the panel was tacked a white half-sheet of paper. It was not easy to decipher the inscription in the failing light, but she finally made it out to be:

"Called away until noon to-morrow (Friday)."

The girl leaned against the door-sill for support. In the first moment or two it seemed to her that she was going to swoon. Then resolution came back to her, and with it a new store of strength, and she went down the stairs again slowly and in terrible doubt as to what should now be done.

The memory suddenly came to her of the one other time she had been in this stairway, when she had stood in the darkness with her little boy, gathered up against the wall to allow the two Minister ladies to pass. Upon the heels of this chased the recollection—with such lack of sequence do our thoughts follow one another—of the singularly sweet smile her little boy had bestowed upon her, half an hour since, when she kissed him.

The smile had lingered in her mind as a beautiful picture. Walking down the stairs now, in the deepening shadows, the revelation dawned upon her all at once—it was his father's smile! Yes, yes—hurriedly the fancy reared itself in her thoughts—thus the lover of her young girlhood had looked upon her. The delicate, clever face; the prettily arched lips; the soft, light curls upon the forehead; the tenderly beaming blue eyes—all were the same.

Often—alas! very often—this resemblance had forced itself upon her consciousness before. But now, lighted up by that chance babyish smile, it came to her in the guise of a novelty, and with a certain fascination in it. Her head seemed to have ceased to ache, now that this almost pleasant thought had entered it. It was passing strange, she felt, that any sense of comfort should exist for her in memories which had fed her soul upon bitterness for so long a time. Yet it was already on the instant apparent to her that when she should next have time to think, that old episode would assume less hateful aspects than it had always presented before.

But now there was no time to think.

At the street door she found her father leaning against a shutter and discussing the events of the day with the village lamplighter, who carried a ladder on his shoulder, and reported great popular agitation to exist.

Jessica beckoned Ben summarily aside, and put into his hands the letter she had written at the shop. "I want you to take this at once to Miss Minster, at her house," she said, hurriedly. "See to it that she gets it herself. Be sure you wait for an answer. Don't say a word to any living soul. Do just what she tells you to do. I've said you can be depended upon. If you show yourself a man, it may make your fortune. Now, hurry; and I do hope you will do me credit!"

Under the spur of this surprising exhortation, Ben walked away with unexampled rapidity, until he had overtaken the lamplighter, from whom he borrowed some chewing tobacco. •

The girl, left to herself, began walking irresolutely down Main Street. The flaring lights in the store windows seemed to add to the confusion of her mind. It had appeared to be important to send her father away at once, but now she began to regret that she had not kept him to help her in her search. For Reuben Tracy must be found at all hazards.

How to go to work to trace him she did not know. She had no notion whatever as to who his intimate friends were. The best device she

could think of would be to ask about him at the various law-offices ; for she had heard that however much lawyers might pretend to fight one another in court, they were all on very good terms outside.

Some little distance down the street she came upon the door of another stairway which bore a number of lawyers' signs. The windows all up the front of this building were lighted, and without further examination she ascended the first flight of stairs. The landing was almost completely dark, but an obscured gleam came from the dusty transoms over three or four doors close about her. She knocked on one of these at random, and in response to an inarticulate vocal sound from within, opened the door and entered.

It was a square, medium-sized room in which she found herself, with a long, paper-littered table in the centre, and tall columns of light leather-covered books rising along the walls. At the opposite end of the chamber a man sat at a desk, his back turned to her, his elbows on the desk, and his head in his hands. The shaded light in front of him made a mellow golden fringe around the outline of his hair.

A sudden bewildering tumult burst forth in the girl's breast as she looked at this figure. Then, as suddenly, the recurring mental echoes of the voice which had bidden her enter rose above this tumult and stilled it. A gentle and comforting warmth stole through her veins. This was Horace Boyce who sat there before her—and she did not hate him !

During that instant in which she stood by the door, a whole flood of self-illumination flashed its rays into every recess of her mind. This, then, was the strange, formless opposing impulse which had warred with the other in her heart for this last miserable fortnight, and dragged her nearly to distraction. She recognized it now, and welcomed it.

The bringing home of her boy had revived for her, by occult and subtle processes, the old romance in which his father had been framed, as might a hero be by sunlit clouds. She hugged the thought to her heart, and stood looking at him motionless and mute.

"Well, who is it? What is wanted?" he called out, querulously, without changing his posture.

Jessica moved slowly toward him. It was as if a magic voice drew her forward in a dream—herself all rapt and dumb.

Irritably impressed by the continued silence, Horace lifted his head, and swung abruptly around in his chair. His own shadow obscured the features of his visitor. He saw only that it was a lady, and rose hesitatingly to his feet.

"Excuse me," he mumbled, "I was busy with my thoughts, and did not know who it was."

"Do you know now?" Jessica heard herself ask, as in a trance. The balmy warmth in her own heart told her that she was smiling.

Horace took a step or two obliquely forward, so that the light fell on her face. He peered with a

confounded gaze at her for a moment, then let his arms fall limp at his sides.

"In the name of the dev—" he began, confusedly, and then bit the word short, and stared at her again. "Is it really you?" he asked at last, reassured in part by her smile.

"Are you sorry to see me?" she asked in turn. Her mind could frame nothing but these soft little meaningless queries.

The young man seemed in doubt how best to answer this question. He turned around and looked abstractedly at his desk; then with a slight detour he walked past her, opened the door, and glanced up and down the dark stairway. When he had closed the door once more, he turned the key in the lock, and then, after momentary reflection, concluded to unlock it again.

"Why, no; why should I be?" he said in a more natural voice, as he returned and stood beside her. Evidently her amiability was a more difficult surprise for him to master than her original advent, and he studied her face with increasing directness of gaze to make sure of it.

"Come and sit down here," he said, after a few moments of this puzzled inspection, and resumed his own chair. "I want a good look at you," he explained, as he lifted the shade from the lamp.

Jessica felt that she was blushing under this new radiance, and it required an effort to return his glance. But, when she did so, the changes in his

face and expression which it revealed drove everything else from her mind. She rose from her chair upon a sudden impulse, and bent over him at a diffident distance. As she did so, she had the feeling that this bitterness in which she had encased herself for years had dropped from her on the instant like a discarded garment.

"Why, Horace, your hair is quite gray!" she said, as if the fact contained the sublimation of pathos.

"There's been trouble enough to turn it white twenty times over! You don't know what I've been through, my girl," he said, sadly. The novel sensation of being sympathized with, welcome as it was, greatly accentuated his sense of deserving compassion.

"I am very sorry," she said, softly. She had seated herself again, and was gradually recovering her self-possession. The whole situation was so remarkable, not to say startling, that she found herself regarding it from the outside, as if she were not a component part of it. Her pulses were no longer strongly stirred by its personal phases. Most clear of all things in her mind was that she was now perfectly independent of this or any other man. She was her own master, and need ask favors from nobody. Therefore, if it pleased her to call by-gones by-gones and make a friend of Horace—or even to put a bandage across her eyes and cull from those by-gones only the rose leaves and violet blossoms, and make for her weary soul a bed of these—what or who was to prevent her?

Some inexplicable, unforeseen revulsion of feeling had made him pleasant in her sight again. There was no doubt about it—she had genuine satisfaction in sitting here opposite him and looking at him. Had she so many pleasures, then, that she should throw this unlooked-for boon deliberately away?

Moreover—and here the new voices called most loudly in her heart—he was worn and unhappy. The iron had palpably entered his soul too. He looked years older than he had any chronological right to look. There were heavy lines of anxiety on his face, and his blonde hair was powdered thick with silver.

"Yes, I am truly sorry," she said again. "Is it business that has gone wrong with you?"

"Business—family—health—sleep—everything!" he groaned, bitterly. "It is literally a hell that I have been living in this last—these last few months!"

"I had no idea of that," she said, simply. Of course it would be ridiculous to ask if there was anything she could do, but she had comfort from the thought that he must realize what was in her mind.

"So help me God, Jess!" he burst out vehemently, under the incentive of her sympathy, "I'm coming to believe that every man is a scoundrel, and every woman a fool!"

"There was a long time when I thought that," she said with a sigh.

He looked quickly at her from under his brows, and then as swiftly turned his glance away. "Yes,

I know," he answered uneasily, tapping with his fingers on the desk.

"But we won't talk of that," she urged, with a little tremor of anxiety in her tone. "We needn't talk of that at all. It was merely by accident that I came here, Horace. I wanted to ask a question, and nothing was further from my head than finding you here."

"Let's see—Mart Jocelyn had this place up to a couple of months ago. Was it he you came to see? I didn't know you knew him."

"No, you foolish boy!" she said, with a smile which had a ground tone of sadness. "I never heard of him before. It was simply any lawyer I was looking for. But what I wanted to say was that I am not angry with you any more. I've learned a host of bitter lessons since we were—young together, and I'm too much alone in the world to want to keep you an enemy. You don't seem so very happy yourself, Horace. Why shouldn't we two be friends again? I'm not talking of anything else, Horace—understand me. But it appeals to me very strongly, this idea of our being friends again."

Horace looked meditatively at her, with softening eyes. "You're the best of the lot, dear old Jess," he said at last, smiling candidly. "Truly I'm glad you came—gladder than I can tell you. I was in the very slough of despond when you entered; and now—well, at least I'm going to play that I am out of it."

Jessica rose with a beaming countenance, and laid

her hand frankly on his shoulder. "I'm glad I came, too," she said. "And very soon I want to see you again—when you are quite free—and have a long, quiet talk."

"All right, my girl," he answered, rising as well. The prospect seemed entirely attractive to him. He took her hand in his, and said again: "All right. And must you go now?"

"Oh, mercy, yes!" she exclaimed, with sudden recollection. "I had no business to stay so long! Perhaps you can tell me—or no—" She vaguely put together in her mind the facts that Tracy and Horace had been partners, and seemed to be so no longer. "No, you wouldn't know."

"Have I so poor a legal reputation as all that?" he said, lightly smiling. "Hang it all! One's friends, at least, ought to dissemble their bad opinions."

"No, it wasn't about law," she explained, stumbly. "It's of no importance. I must hurry now. Good-by for the time."

He would have drawn her to him and kissed her at this, but she gently prevented the caress, and released herself from his hands.

"Not that," she said, with a smile in which still some sadness lingered. "I would rather not that. It is better so. And—good-by, Horace, for the time."

He went with her to the door, lighting the hall gas that she might see her way down the stairs. When she had disappeared, he walked for a little up and

down the room, whistling softly to himself. It was undeniable that the world seemed vastly brighter to him than it had only a half-hour before. Mere contact with somebody who liked him for himself was a refreshing novelty.

"A damned decent sort of girl—considering everything!" he mused aloud, as he locked up his desk for the day.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ALARM AT THE FARMHOUSE.

TO come upon the street again was like the confused awakening from a dream. With the first few steps Jessica found herself shivering in an extremity of cold, yet still uncomfortably warm. A sudden passing spasm of giddiness, too, made her head swim so that for the instant she feared to fall. Then, with an added sense of weakness, she went on, wearily and desponding.

The recollection of this novel and curious happiness upon which she had stumbled only a few moments before took on now the character of self-reproach. The burning headache had returned, and with it came a pained consciousness that it had been little less than criminal in her to weakly dally in Horace's office when such urgent responsibility rested upon her outside. If the burden of this responsibility appeared too great for her to bear, now that her strength seemed to be so strangely leaving her, there was all the more reason for her to set her teeth together, and press forward, even if she staggered as she went.

Only—where to find Reuben Tracy! The search had been made cruelly hopeless by that shameful delay; and she blamed herself with fierceness for

it, as she racked her brain for some new plan, wondering whether she ought to have asked Horace or gone into some of the other offices.

There were groups of men standing here and there on the corners—a little away from the full light of the street-lamps, as if unwilling to court observation. These knots of workmen had a sinister significance to her feverish mind. She had the clew to the terrible mischief which some of them intended—which no doubt even now they were canvassing in furtive whispers—and only Tracy could stop it, and she was powerless to find him!

There came slouching along the sidewalk, as she grappled with this anguish of irresolution, a slight and shabby figure which somehow arrested her attention. It was a familiar enough figure—that of old "Cal" Gedney; and there was nothing unusual or worthy of comment in the fact that he was walking unsteadily by himself, with his gaze fixed intently on the sidewalk. He had passed again out of the range of her cursory glance before she suddenly remembered that he was a lawyer, and even some kind of a judge.

She turned swiftly and almost ran after him, clutching his sleeve as she came up to him, and breathing so hard with weakness and excitement that for the moment she could not speak.

The 'squire looked up, and angrily shook his arm out of her grasp. "Leave me alone, you hussy," he snarled, "or I'll lock you up!"

His misconstruction of her purpose cleared her mind. "Don't be foolish," she said, hurriedly. "It's a question of perhaps life and death! Do you know where Reuben Tracy is? Or can you tell me where I can find out?"

"He don't want to be bothered with *you*, wherever he is," was the surly response. "Be off with you!"

"I told you it was a matter of life and death," she insisted, earnestly. "He'll never forgive you—you'll never forgive yourself—if you know and won't tell me."

The sincerity of the girl's tone impressed the old man. It was not easy for him to stand erect and unaided without swaying, but his mind was evidently clear enough.

"What do you want with him?" he asked, in a less unfriendly voice. Then he added, in a reflective undertone: "Cur'ous 't I sh'd want see Tracy, too."

"Then you do know where he is?"

"He's drove out to 's mother's farm. 'Seems word come old woman's sick. You're one of that Lawton tribe, aren't you?"

"If I get a cutter, will you drive out there with me?" She asked the question with swift directness. She added in explanation, as he stared vacantly at her: "I ask that because you said you wanted to see him, that's all. I shall go alone if you won't come. He's *got* to be back here this evening, or God only knows what'll happen! I mean what I say!"

"Do you know the road?" the 'squire asked, catching something of her own eager spirit.

"Every inch of it! I was born half a mile from where his mother lives."

"But you won't tell me what your business is?"

"I'll tell you this much," she whispered, hastily. "There is going to be a mob at the Minster house to-night. A girl who knows one of the men told—"

The old 'squire cut short the revelation by grasping her arm with fierce energy.

"Come on—come on!" he said, hoarsely. "Don't waste a minute. By God! We'll gallop the horses both ways." He muttered to himself with excitement as he dragged her along.

Jessica waited outside the livery stable for what seemed an interminable period, while old "Cal" was getting the horses—walking up and down the path in a state of mental torment which precluded all sense of bodily suffering. When she conjured up before her frightened mind the terrible consequences which delay might entail, every minute became an intolerable hour of torture. There was even the evil chance that the old man had been refused the horses because he had been drinking.

Finally, however, there came the welcome sound of mailed hoofs on the plank roadway inside, and the reverberating jingle of bells; and then the 'squire, with a spacious double-seated sleigh containing plenty of robes, drew up in front of a cutting in the snow.

She took the front seat without hesitation, and

gathered the lines into her own hands. "Let me drive," she said, clucking the horses into a rapid trot. "I *should* be home in bed. I'm too ill to sit up, unless I'm doing something that keeps me from giving up."

Reuben Tracy felt the evening in the sitting-room of the old farmhouse to be the most trying ordeal of his adult life.

Ordinarily he rather enjoyed than otherwise the company of his brother Ezra—a large, powerfully built, heavily bearded man, who sat now beside him in a rocking-chair in front of the wood stove, his stockinged feet on the hearth, and a last week's agricultural paper on his knee. Ezra was a worthy and hard-working citizen, with an original way of looking at things, and considerable powers of expression. As a rule, the lawyer liked to talk with him, and felt that he profited in ideas and suggestions from the talk.

But to-night he found his brother insufferably dull, and the task of keeping down the "fidgets" one of incredible difficulty. His mother—on whose account he had been summoned—was so much better that Ezra's wife had felt warranted in herself going off to bed, to get some much-needed rest. Ezra had argued for a while, rather perversely, about the tariff duty on wool, and now was nodding in his chair, although the dim-faced old wooden clock showed it to be barely eight o'clock. The kerosene lamp on the table gave forth only a feeble, reddened light

through its smoky chimney, but diffused a most powerful odor upon the stuffy air of the over-heated room. A ragged and strong-smelling old farm dog groaned offensively from time to time in his sleep behind the stove. Even the draught which roared through the lower apertures in front of the stove and up the pipe toward the chimney was irritating by the very futility of its vehemence, for the place was too hot already.

Reuben mused in silence upon the chances which had led him so far away from this drowsy, unfruitful life, and smiled as he found himself wondering if it would be in the least possible for him to return to it. No—no one ever did return. The bright boys, the restless boys, the boys of energy, of ambition, of yearning for culture or conquest or the mere sensation of living where it was really life—all went away, leaving none but the Ezras behind. Some succeeded; some failed; but none of them ever came back. And the Ezras who remained on the farms—they seemed to shut and bolt the doors of their minds against all idea of making their own lot less sterile and barren and uninviting.

The mere mental necessity for a great contrast brought up suddenly in Reuben's thoughts a picture of the drawing-room in the home of the Minsters. It seemed as if the whole vast swing of the mind's pendulum separated that luxurious abode of cultured wealth from this dingy and barren farmhouse room. And he, who had been born and reared in this latter, now found himself at a loss how to spend so much

as a single evening in its environment, so completely had familiarity with the other remoulded and changed his habits, his point of view, his very character. Curious slaves of habit—creatures of their surroundings—men were !

A loud, peremptory knocking at the door aroused Reuben abruptly from his reverie, and Ezra, too, opened his eyes with a start, and sitting upright rubbed them confusedly.

"Now I think of it, I heard a sleigh stop," said Reuben, rising. "It can't be the doctor this time of night, can it?"

"It 'ud be jest like him," commented Ezra, cap-tiously. "He's a great hand to keep dropping in, sort of casual-like, when there's sickness in the house. It all goes down in his bill."

The farmer brother had also risen, and now, lamp in hand, walked heavily in his stocking feet to the door, and opened it half way. Some indistinct words passed, and then, shading the flickering flame with his huge hairy hand, Ezra turned his head.

"Somebody to see you, Rube," he said. On second thought he added to the visitor in a tone of formal politeness: "Won't you step in, ma'am?"

Jessica Lawton almost pushed her host aside in her impulsive response to his invitation. But when she had crossed the threshold the sudden change into a heated atmosphere seemed to go to her brain like chloroform. She stood silent, staring at Reuben, with parted lips and hands nervously twitching. Even as he, in his complete surprise, recognized his

visitor, she trembled violently from head to foot, made a forward step, tottered, and fell inertly into Ezra's big, protecting arm.

"I guessed she was going to do it," said the farmer, not dissembling his pride at the alert way in which the strange woman had been caught, and holding up the lamp with his other hand in triumph. "Hannah keeled over in that same identical way when Suky run her finger through the cogs of the wringing-machine, and I ketched her, too!"

Reuben had hurriedly come to his brother's assistance. The two men placed the fainting girl in the rocking-chair, and the lawyer began with anxious fumbling to loosen the neck of her cloak and draw off her gloves. Her fingers were like ice, and her brow, though it felt now almost equally cold, was covered with perspiration. Reuben rubbed her hands between his broad palms in a crudely informed belief that it was the right thing to do, while Ezra rummaged in the adjoining pantry for the household bottle of brandy.

Jessica came out of her swoon with the first touch of the pungent spirit upon her whitened lips. She looked with weak blankness at the unfamiliar scene about her, until her gaze fell upon the face of the lawyer. Then she smiled faintly and closed her eyes again.

"She is an old friend of mine," whispered Reuben to his brother, as he pressed the brandy once more upon her. "She'll come to in a minute. It must be something serious that brought her out here."

The girl languidly opened her eyes. "'Cal' Gedney's asleep in the sleigh," she murmured. "You'd better bring him in. He'll tell you."

It was with an obvious effort that she said this much; and now, while Ezra hastily pulled on his boots, her eyes closed again, and her head sank with utter weariness sideways upon the high back of the old-fashioned chair.

Reuben stood looking at her in pained anxiety—once or twice holding the lamp close to her pale face, in dread of he knew not what—until his brother returned. Ezra had brought the horses up into the yard, and remained outside now to blanket them, while the old 'squire, benumbed and drowsy, found his way into the house. It was evident enough to the young lawyer's first glance that Gedney had been drinking heavily.

"Well, what does this all mean?" he demanded, with vexed asperity.

"You've got to get on your things and race back with us, helly-to-hoot!" said the 'squire. "Quick—there ain't a minute to lose!" The old man almost gasped in his eagerness.

"In Heaven's name, what's up? Have you been to Cadmus?"

"Yes, and got my pocket full of affidavits. We can send all three of them to prison fast enough. But that'll do to-morrow; for to-night there's a mob up at the Minster place. *Look there!*"

The old man had gone to the window and swept the stiff curtain aside. He held it now

with a trembling hand, so that Reuben could look out.

The whole southern sky overhanging Thessaly was crimson with the reflection of a fire.

"Great God! it's the rolling mill," ejaculated Reuben, breathlessly.

"Quite as likely it's the Minster house; it's the same direction, only farther off, and fires are deceptive," said Gedney, his excitement rising under the stimulus of the spectacle.

Reuben had kicked off his slippers, and was now dragging on his shoes. "Tell me about it," he said, working furiously at the laces.

'Squire Gedney helped himself generously to the brandy on the table as he unfolded, in somewhat incoherent fashion, his narrative. The Lawton girl had somehow found out that a hostile demonstration against the Minsters was intended for the evening, and had started out to find Tracy. By accident she had met him (Gedney), and they had come off in the sleigh together. She had insisted upon driving, and as his long journey from Cadmus had greatly fatigued him, he had got over into the back seat and gone to sleep under the buffalo robes. He knew nothing more until Ezra had roused him from his slumber in the sled, now at a standstill on the road outside, and he had awakened to discover Jessica gone, the horses wet and shivering in a cloud of steam, and the sky behind them all ablaze.

"Jee-Whitaker! Looks as if the whole town was burning," said Ezra, coming in as this recital

was concluded. "Them horses would a-got their death out there in another ten minutes. Guess I'd better put 'em in the barn, eh?"

"No, no! Just turn them around. I've got to drive them back faster than they came," said Reuben, who had on his overcoat and hat. "Hurry, and get me some thick gloves to drive in. I'll leave my things here. We won't wake mother up. I'll get you to run in to-morrow, if you will, and let me know how she is. Tell her I *had* to go."

When Ezra had found the gloves and brought them, the two men for the first time bent an instinctive joint glance at the recumbent figure of the girl in the rocking-chair.

"I'll get Hannah up," said the farmer, "and she can have your room. I guess she's too sick to try to go back with you. If she's well enough, I'll bring her in in the morning. I was going to take in some apples, anyway."

To their surprise Jessica opened her eyes and even lifted her head at these words.

"No," she said; "I feel better now—much better. I must go back with Mr. Tracy. I really must."

She rose to her feet as she spoke, and, though she was conscious of great dizziness and languor, succeeded by her smile in imposing upon her unskilled companions. Perhaps if Hannah had been "got up" she would have seen through the weak pretence of strength, and insisted on having matters ordered otherwise. But the men offered no dissent. Jessica was persuaded to drink another glass of

brandy, and 'Squire Gedney took one without being specially urged ; and then Reuben impatiently led the way out to the sleigh, which Ezra had turned around.

"No ; I'd rather be in front with you," the girl said, when Reuben had spread the robes for her to sit in the back seat. "Let the Judge sit there ; he wants to sleep. I'm not tired now, and I want to keep awake."

Thus it was arranged, and Reuben, with a strong hand on the tight reins, started the horses on their homeward rush toward the flaming horizon.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PACING TOWARD THE REDDENED SKY.

FOR some time there was no conversation in the sleigh. The horses sped evenly forward, with their heads well in the air, as if they too were excited by the unnatural glare in the sky ahead. Before long there was added to the hurried regular beating of their hoofs upon the hard-packed track another sound—the snoring of the 'squire on the seat behind.

There was a sense of melting in the air. Save where the intense glow of the conflagration lit up the sky with a fan-like spread of ruddy luminance—fierce orange at the central base, and then through an expanse of vermilion, rose, and cherry to deepening crimsons and dull reddish purples—the heavens hung black with snow-laden clouds. A pleasant, moist night-breeze came softly across the valley, bearing ever and again a solitary flake of snow. The effect of this mild wind was so grateful to Jessica's face, now once more burning with an inner heat, that she gave no thought to a curious difficulty in breathing which was growing upon her.

"The scoundrels shall pay dear for this," Reuben said to her, between set teeth, when there came a

place in the road where the horses must be allowed to walk up hill.

"I'm sure I hope so," she said, quite in his spirit.

The husky note in her voice caught his attention. "Are you sure you are bundled up warm enough?" he asked with solicitude, pulling the robe higher about her.

"Oh, yes. I'm not very well. I caught a heavy cold yesterday," she answered. "But it will be nothing, if only we can get there in time."

It struck her as strange when Reuben presently replied, putting the whip once more to the horses: "God only knows what can be done when I do get there!" It had seemed to her a matter of course that Tracy would be equal to any emergency—even an armed riot. There was something almost disheartening in this confession of self-doubt.

"But at any rate they shall pay for it to-morrow," he broke out, angrily, a moment later. "Down to the last pennyweight we will have our pound of flesh! My girl," he added, turning to look into her face, and speaking with deep earnestness, "I never knew what it was before to feel wholly merciless—absolutely without bowels of compassion. But I will not abate so much as the fraction of a hair with these villains. I swear that!"

By an odd contradiction, his words raised a vague spirit of compunction within her. "They feel very bitterly," she ventured to suggest. "It is terrible to be turned out of work in the winter, and with families dependent on that work for bare existence.

And then the bringing in of these strange workmen. I suppose that is what—”

Reuben interrupted her with an abrupt laugh. “I’m not thinking of them,” he said. “Poor foolish fellows, I don’t wish them any harm. I only pray God they haven’t done too much harm to themselves. No: it’s the swindling scoundrels who are responsible for the mischief—*they* are the ones I’ll put the clamps onto to-morrow.”

The words conveyed no meaning to her, and she kept silent until he spoke further: “I don’t know whether he told you, but Gedney has brought me to-night the last links needed for a chain of proof which must send all three of these ruffians to State prison. I haven’t had time to examine the papers yet, but he says he’s got them in his pocket there—affidavits from the original inventor of certain machinery, about its original sale, and from others who were a party to it—which makes the whole fraud absolutely clear. I’ll go over them to-night, when we’ve seen this thing through”—pointing vaguely with his whip toward the reddened sky—“and if to-morrow I don’t lay all three of them by the heels, you can have my head for a foot-ball!”

“I don’t understand these things very well,” said Jessica. “Who is it you mean?” It was growing still harder for her to breathe, and sharp pain came in her breast now with almost every respiration. Her head ached, too, so violently that she cared very little indeed who it was that should go to prison to-morrow.

"There are three of them in the scheme," said the lawyer; "as cold-blooded and deliberate a piece of robbery as ever was planned. First, there's a New York man named Wendover—they call him a Judge—a smart, subtle, slippery scoundrel if ever there was one. Then there's Schuyler Tenney—perhaps you know who he is—he's a big hardware merchant here; and with him in the swindle was—Good heavens! Why, I never thought of it before!"

Reuben had stopped short in his surprise. He began whipping the horses now with a seeming air of exultation, and stole a momentary smile-lit glance toward his companion.

"It's just occurred to me," he said. "Curious—I hadn't given it a thought. Why, my girl, it's like a special providence. You, too, will have your full revenge—such revenge as you never dreamt of. The third man is Horace Boyce!"

A great wave of cold stupor engulfed the girl's reason as she took in these words, and her head swam and roared as if in truth she had been plunged headlong into unknown depths of icy water.

When she came to the surface of consciousness again, the horses were still rhythmically racing along the hill-side road overlooking the village. The fire-light in the sky had faded down now to a dull pinkish effect like the northern lights. Reuben was chewing an unlighted cigar, and the 'squire was steadily snoring behind them. It had begun to snow.

"You will send them all to prison—surely?" she was able to ask.

"As surely as God made little apples!" was the sententious response.

The girl was cowering under the buffalo-robe in an anguish of mind so terribly intense that her physical pains were all forgotten. Only her throbbing head seemed full of thick blood, and there was such an awful need that she should think clearly! She bit her lips in tortured silence, striving through a myriad of wandering, crowding ideas to lay hold upon something which should be of help.

They had begun to descend the hill—a steep, uneven road full of drifts, beyond which stretched a level mile of highway leading into the village itself—when suddenly a bold thought came to her, which on the instant had shot up, powerful and commanding, into a very tower of resolution. She laid her hand on Reuben's arm.

"If you don't mind, I'll change into the back seat," she said, in a voice which all her efforts could not keep from shaking. "I'm feeling very ill. It'll be easier for me there."

Reuben at once drew up the horses, and the girl, summoning all her strength, managed without his help to get around the side of the sleigh, and under the robe, into the rear seat. The 'squire was sunk in such a profound sleep that she had to push him bodily over into his own half of the space, and the discovery that this did not waken him filled her with so great a delight that all her strength and self-

control seemed miraculously to have returned to her.

She had need of them both for the task which she had imposed upon herself, and which now, with infinite caution and trepidation, she set herself about. This was nothing less than to secure the papers which the old 'squire had brought from Cadmus, and which, from something she remembered his having said, must be in the inner pocket of one of his coats. Slowly and deftly she opened button after button of his overcoat, and gently pushed aside the cloth until her hand might have free passage to and from the pocket, where, after careful soundings, she had discovered a bundle of thick papers to be resting. Then whole minutes seemed to pass before, having taken off her glove, she was able to draw this packet out. Once during this operation Reuben half turned to speak to her, and her fright was very great. But she had had the presence of mind to draw the robe high about her, and answer collectedly, and he had palpably suspected nothing. As for Gedney, he never once stirred in his drunken sleep.

The larceny was complete, and Jessica had been able to wrap the old man up again, to button the parcel of papers under her own cloak, and to draw on and fasten her glove once more, before the panting horses had gained the outskirts of the village. She herself was breathing almost as heavily as the animals after their gallop, and, now that the deed was done, lay back wearily in her seat, with pain

racking her every joint and muscle, and a sickening dread in her mind lest there should be neither strength nor courage forthcoming for what remained to do.

For a considerable distance down the street no person was visible from whom the eager Tracy could get news of what had happened. At last, however, when the sleigh was within a couple of blocks of what seemed in the distance to be a centre of interest, a man came along who shouted from the sidewalk, in response to Reuben's questions, sundry leading facts of importance.

A fire had started—probably incendiary—in the basement of the office of the Minster furnaces, some hour or so ago, and had pretty well gutted the building. The firemen were still playing on the ruins. An immense crowd had witnessed the fire, and it was the drunkenest crowd he had ever seen in Thessaly. Where the money came from to buy so much drink, was what puzzled him. The crowd had pretty well cleared off now; some said they had gone up to the Minster house to give its occupants a "horning." He himself had got his feet wet, and was afraid of the rheumatics if he stayed out any longer. Probably he would get them, as it was. Everybody said that the building was insured, and some folks hinted that the company had it set on fire themselves.

Reuben impatiently whipped up the jaded team at this, with a curt "Much obliged," and drove at a spanking pace down the street to the scene of the

conflagration. There was not much remaining to see. The outer walls of the office building were still gloomily erect, but within nothing was left but a glowing mass of embers about level with the ground. Some firemen were inside the yard, but more were congregated about the water-soaked space where the engine still noisily throbbed, and where hot coffee was being passed around to them. Here, too, there was a report that the crowd had gone up to the Minster house.

The horses tugged vehemently to drag the sleigh over the impedimenta of hose stretched along the street, and over the considerable area of bare stones where the snow had been melted by the heat or washed away by the streams from the hydrants. Then Reuben half rose in his seat to lash them into a last furious gallop, and, snorting with rebellion, they tore onward toward the seminary road.

At the corner, three doors from the home of the Minster ladies, Reuben deemed it prudent to draw up. There was evidently a considerable throng in the road in front of the house, and that still others were on the lawn within the gates was obvious from the confused murmur which came therefrom. Some boys were blowing spasmodically on fish-horns, and rough jeers and loud boisterous talk rose and fell throughout the dimly visible assemblage. The air had become thick with large wet snowflakes.

Reuben sprang from the sleigh, and, stepping backward, vigorously shook old Gedney into a state of semi-wakefulness.

"Hold these lines," he said, "and wait here for me.—Or," he turned to Jessica with the sudden thought, "would you rather he drove you home?"

The girl had been in a half-insensible condition of mind and body. At the question she roused herself and shook her head. "No: let me stay here," she said, wearily.

But when Reuben, squaring his broad shoulders and shaking himself to free his muscles after the long ride, had disappeared with an energetic stride in the direction of the crowd, Jessica forced herself to sit upright, and then to rise to her feet.

"You'd better put the blankets on the horses, if he doesn't come back right off," she said to the 'squire.

"Where are you going?" Gedney asked, still stupid with sleep.

"I'll walk up and down," she answered, clambering with difficulty out of the sleigh. "I'm tired of sitting still."

Once on the sidewalk, she grew suddenly faint, and grasped a fence-picket for support. The hand which she instinctively raised to her heart touched the hard surface of the packet of papers, and the thought which this inspired put new courage into her veins.

With bowed head and a hurried, faltering step, she turned her back upon the Minster house and stole off into the snowy darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CONQUEST OF THE MOB.

EVEN before he reached the gates of the carriage-drive opening upon the Minster lawn, Reuben Tracy encountered some men whom he knew, and gathered that the people in the street outside were in the main peaceful on-lookers, who did not understand very clearly what was going on, and disapproved of the proceedings as far as they comprehended them. There was a crowd inside the grounds, he was told, made up in part of men who were out of work, but composed still more largely, it seemed, of boys and young hoodlums generally, who were improving the pretext to indulge in horseplay. There was a report that some sort of deputation had gone up on the doorstep and rung the bell, with a view to making some remarks to the occupants of the house ; but that they had failed to get any answer, and certainly the whole front of the residence was black as night.

Reuben easily obtained the consent of several of these citizens to follow him, and, as they went on, the number swelled to ten or a dozen. Doubtless many more could have been incorporated in the impromptu procession had it not been so hopelessly dark.

The lawyer led his friends through the gate, and began pushing his way up the gravelled path through the crowd. No special opposition was offered to his progress, for the air was so full of snow now that only those immediately affected knew anything about it. Although the path was fairly thronged, nobody seemed to have any idea why he was standing there. Those who spoke appeared in the main to regard the matter as a joke, the point of which was growing more and more obscure. Except for some sporadic horn-blowing and hooting nearer to the house, the activity of the assemblage was confined to a handful of boys, who mustered among them two or three kerosene oil torches treasured from the last Presidential campaign, and a grotesque jack-o'-lantern made of a pumpkin and elevated on a broom-stick. These urchins were running about among the little groups of bystanders, knocking off one another's caps, shouting prodigiously, and having a good time.

As Reuben and those accompanying him approached the house, some of these lads raised the cry of "Here's the coppers!" and the crowd at this seemed to close up with a simultaneous movement, while a murmur ran across its surface like the wind over a field of corn. This sound was one less of menace or even excitement than of gratification that at last something was going to happen.

One of the boys with a torch, in the true spirit of his generation, placed himself in front of Reuben and marched with mock gravity at the head of the

advancing group. This, drolly enough, lent the movement a semblance of authority, or at least of significance, before which the men more readily than ever gave way. At this the other boys with the torches and jack-o'-lantern fell into line at the rear of Tracy's immediate supporters, and they in turn were followed by the throng generally. Thus whimsically escorted, Reuben reached the front steps of the mansion.

A more compact and apparently homogeneous cluster of men stood here, some of them even on the steps, and dark and indistinct as everything was, Reuben leaped to the conclusion that these were the men at least visibly responsible for this strange gathering. Presumably they were taken by surprise at his appearance with such a following. At any rate, they, too, offered no concerted resistance, and he mounted to the platform of the steps without difficulty. Then he turned and whispered to a friend to have the boys with the torches also come up. This was a suggestion gladly obeyed, not least of all by the boy with the low-comedy pumpkin, whose illumination created a good-natured laugh.

Tracy stood now, bareheaded in the falling snow, facing the throng. The gathering of the lights about him indicated to everybody in the grounds that the aimless demonstration had finally assumed some kind of form. A general forward movement was the first result. Then there were admonitory shouts here and there, under the influence of which the horn-blowing gradually ceased, and Tracy's name

was passed from mouth to mouth until its mention took on almost the character of a personal cheer on the outskirts of the crowd. In answer to this two or three hostile interrogations or comments were bawled out, but the throng did not favor these, and so there fell a silence which invited Reuben to speak.

"My friends," he began, and then stopped because he had not pitched his voice high enough, and a whole semicircle of cries of "louder!" rose from the darkness of the central lawn.

"He's afraid of waking the fine ladies," called out an anonymous voice.

"Shut up, Tracy, and let the pumpkin talk," was another shout.

"Begorrah, it's the pumpkin that *is* talkin' now!" cried a shrill third voice, and at this there was a ripple of laughter.

"My friends," began Reuben, in a louder tone, this time without immediate interruption, "although I don't know precisely why you have gathered here at so much discomfort to yourselves, I have some things to say to you which I think you will regard as important. I have not seen the persons who live in this house since Tuesday, but while I can easily understand that your coming here to-night might otherwise cause them some anxiety, I am sure that they, when they come to understand it, will be as glad as I am that you *are* here, and that I am given this opportunity of speaking for them to you. If you had not taken this notion of coming here to-night, I should have, in a day or two, asked you to

meet me somewhere else, in a more convenient place, to talk matters over.

"First of all let me tell you that the works are going to be opened promptly, certainly the furnaces, and unless I am very much mistaken about the law, the rolling mills too. I give you my word for that, as the legal representative of two of these women."

"Yes; they'll be opened with the Frenchmen!" came a swift answering shout.

"Or will you get Chinamen?" cried another, amid derisive laughter.

Reuben responded in his clearest tones: "No man who belongs to Thessaly shall be crowded out by a newcomer. I give you my word for that, too."

Some scattered cheers broke out at this announcement, which promised for the instant to become general, and then were hushed down by the prevalent anxiety to hear more. In this momentary interval Reuben caught the sound of a window being cautiously raised immediately above the front door, and guessed with a little flutter of the heart who this new auditor might be.

"Secondly," he went on, "you ought to be told the truth about the shutting down of the furnaces and the lockout. These women were not at all responsible for either action. I know of my own knowledge that both things caused them genuine grief, and that they were shocked beyond measure at the proposal to bring outside workmen into the town to undersell and drive away their own neighbors and fellow-townsmen. I want you to realize

this, because otherwise you would do a wrong in your minds to these good women who belong to Thessaly, who are as fond of our village and its people as any other soul within its borders, and who, for their own sake as well as that of Stephen Minster's memory, deserve respect and liking at your hands.

"I may tell you frankly that they were misled and deceived by agents, in whom, mistakenly enough, they trusted, into temporarily giving power to these unworthy men. The result was a series of steps which they deplored, but did not know how to stop. A few days ago I was called into the case to see what could be done toward undoing the mischief from which they, and you, and the townspeople generally, suffer. Since then I have been hard at work both in court and out of it, and I believe I can say with authority that the attempt to plunder the Minster estate and to impoverish you will be beaten all along the line."

This time the outburst of cheering was spontaneous and prolonged. When it died away, some voice called out, "Three cheers for the ladies!" and these were given, too, not without laughter at the jack-o'-lantern boy, who waved his pumpkin vigorously.

"One word more," called out Tracy, "and I hope you will take in good part what I am going to say. When I made my way up through the grounds, I was struck by the fact that nobody seemed to know just why he had come here. I gather now that word

was passed around during the day that there would be a crowd here, and that something, nobody understood just what, would be done after they got here. I do not know who started the idea, or who circulated the word. It might be worth your while to find out. Meanwhile, don't you agree with me that it is an unsatisfactory and uncivil way of going at the thing? This is a free country, but just because it *is* free, we ought to feel the more bound to respect one another's rights. There are countries in which, I dare say, if I were a citizen, or rather a subject, I might feel it my duty to head a mob or join a riot. But here there ought to be no mob; there should be no room for even thought of a riot. Our very strength lies in the idea that we are our own policemen—our own soldiery. I say this not because one in a hundred of you meant any special harm in coming here, but because the notion of coming itself was not American. Beware of men who suggest that kind of thing. Beware of men who preach the theory that because you are puddlers or moulders or firemen, therefore you are different from the rest of your fellow-citizens. I, for one, resent the idea that because I am a lawyer, and you, for example, are a blacksmith, therefore we belong to different classes. I wish with all my heart that everybody resented it, and that that abominable word 'classes' could be wiped out of the English language as it is spoken in America. That is all. I am glad if you feel easier in your minds than you did when you came. If you do, I guess there's been no harm done by your com-

ing which isn't more than balanced by the good that has come out of it. Only next time, if you don't mind, we'll have our meeting somewhere else, where it will be easier to speak than it is in a snowstorm, and where we won't keep our neighbors awake. And now good-night, everybody."

Out of the satisfied and amiable murmur which spread through the crowd at this, there rose a sharp, querulous voice:

"Give us the names of the men who, you say, *were* responsible."

"No, I can't do that to-night. But if you read the next list of indictments found by the grand jury of Dearborn County, my word as a lawyer you'll find them all there."

The loudest cheer of the evening burst upon the air at this, and there was a sustained roar when Tracy's name was shouted out above the tumult. Some few men crowded up to the steps to shake hands with him, and many others called out to him a personal "good-night." The last of those to shake the accumulated snow from their collars and hats, and turn their steps homeward, noted that the whole front of the Minster house had suddenly become illuminated.

Thus Reuben's simple and highly fortuitous conquest of what had been planned to be a mob was accomplished. It is remembered to this day as the best thing any man ever did single-handed in Thesaly, and it is always spoken of as the foundation of his present political eminence. But he himself

would say now, upon reflection, that he succeeded because the better sense of his auditors, from the outset, wanted him to succeed, and because he was lucky enough to impress a very decent and bright-witted lot of men with the idea that he wasn't a humbug.

At the moment he was in no mood to analyze his success. His hair was streaming with melted snow, his throat was painfully hoarse and sore, and the fatigue from speaking so loud, and the reaction from his great excitement, combined to make him feel a very weak brother indeed.

So utterly wearied was he that when the door of the now lighted hallway opened behind him, and Miss Kate herself, standing in front of the servant on the threshold, said: "We want you to come in, Mr. Tracy," he turned mechanically and went in, thinking more of a drink of some sort and a chance to sit down beside her, than of all the possible results of his speech to the crowd.

The effect of warmth and welcome inside the mansion was grateful to all his senses. He parted with his hat and overcoat, took the glass of claret which was offered him, and allowed himself to be led into the drawing-room and given a seat, all in a happy daze, which was, in truth, so very happy, that he was dimly conscious of the beginnings of tears in his eyes. It seemed now that the strain upon his mind and heart—the anger, and fright, and terrible anxiety—had lasted for whole weary years. Trial

by soul-torture was new to him, and this ordeal through which he had passed left him curiously flabby and tremulous.

He lay back in the easy-chair in an ecstasy of physical lassitude and mental content, surrendering himself to the delight of watching the beautiful girl before him, and of listening to the music of her voice. The liquid depths of brown eyes into which he looked, and the soft tones which wooed his hearing, produced upon him vaguely the sensation of shining white robes and celestial harps—an indefinitely glorious recompense for the travail that lay behind in the valley of the shadow of death.

Nothing was further from him than the temptation to break this bright spell by speech.

"We heard almost every word of what you said," Kate was saying. "When you began we were in this room, crouched there by the window—that is, Ethel and I were, for mamma refused to even pretend to listen—and at first we thought it was one of the mob, and then Ethel recognized your voice. That almost annoyed me, for it seemed as if *I* should have been—at least, equally quick to know it—that is, I mean, I've heard you speak so much more than she has. And then we both hurried up-stairs, and lifted the window—and oh! but we listened!

"And from the moment we knew it was you—that you were here—we felt perfectly safe. It doesn't seem now that we were very much afraid, even before that, although probably we were. There was a lot of hooting, and that dreadful blowing on horns,

and all that, and once somebody rang the door-bell; but, beyond throwing snowballs, nothing else was done. So I daresay they only wanted to scare us. Of course it was the fire that made us really nervous. We got that brave girl's warning about the mob's coming here just a little while before the sky began to redden with the blaze; and that sight, coming on the heels of her letter—"

"What girl? What letter?" asked Reuben.

"Here it is," answered Kate, drawing a crumpled sheet of paper from her bosom, and reading aloud:

"DEAR MISS MINSTER:

"I have just heard that a crowd of men are coming to your house to-night to do violent things. I am starting out to try and bring you help. Meanwhile, I send you my father, who will do whatever you tell him to do.

"Gratefully yours,

"JESSICA LAWTON."

Reuben had risen abruptly to his feet before the signature was reached.

"I am ashamed of myself," he said; "I've left her out there all this while. And she was ill, too! There was so much else that really she escaped my memory altogether."

He had made his way out into the hall and taken up his hat and coat.

"You will come back, won't you?" Kate asked. "There are so many things to talk over, with all of us. And—and bring her too, if—if she will come."

With a sign of acquiescence and comprehension

Reuben darted down the steps and into the darkness. In a very few minutes he returned, disappointment written all over his face.

"She's gone. Gedney, the man I left with the sleigh, says she went off as soon as I had got out of sight. I had offered to have him drive her home, but she refused. She's a curiously independent girl."

"I am very sorry," said Kate. "But I will go over the first thing in the morning and thank her."

"You don't as yet know the half of what you have to thank her for," put in the lawyer. "I don't mean that it was so great a thing—my coming—but she drove all the way out to my mother's farm to bring me here to-night, and fainted when she got there. She was really ill. If her father is still here, I think he'd better go at once to her place, and see about her."

The suggestion seemed a good one, and was instantly acted upon. Ben Lawton had been in the kitchen, immensely proud of his position as the responsible garrison of a beleaguered house, and came out into the hallway now with a full stomach and a satisfied expression on his lank face.

He assented with readiness to Reuben's idea, when it was explained to him.

"So she druv out to your mother's place for you, did she?" he commented, admiringly. "That girl's a genuwine chip of the old block. I mean," he added, with an apologetic smile, "of the old, old block. I ain't got so much git-up-and-git about me,

that I know of, but her grandfather was a regular snorter!"

"We shall not forget how much we are obliged to you, Mr. Lawton," said Kate, pleasantly, offering him her hand. "Be sure that you tell your daughter, too, how grateful we all are."

Ben took the delicate hand thus amazingly extended to him, and shook it with formal awkwardness.

"I didn't seem to do much," he said, deprecatingly, "and perhaps I wouldn't have amounted to much, neether, if it had a-come to fightin' and gougin' and wras'lin' round generally. But you can bet your boots, ma'am, that I'd a-done what I could!"

With this chivalrous assurance Ben withdrew, and marched down the steps with a carriage more nearly erect than Thessaly had ever seen him assume before.

The heavy front door swung to, and Reuben realized, with a new rush of charmed emotion, that heaven had opened for him once more.

A servant came and whispered something to Miss Kate. The latter nodded, and then turned to Reuben with a smile full of light and softness.

"If you will give me your arm," she said, in a delicious murmur, "we will go into the dining-room. My mother and sister are waiting for us there. We are not supper-people as a rule, but it seemed right to have one to-night."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SHINING REWARD.

THE scene which opened upon Reuben's eyes was like a vista of fairyland. The dark panelled room, with its dim suggestions of gold frames and heavy curtains, and its background of palms and oleanders, contributed with the reticence of richness to the glowing splendor of the table in its centre. Here all light was concentrated—light which fell from beneath ruby shades at the summits of tall candles, and softened the dazzling whiteness of the linen, mellowed the burnished gleam of the silver plate, reflected itself in tender, prismatic hues from the facets of the cut-glass decanters. There were flowers here which gave forth still the blended fragrance of their hot-house home, and fragile, painted china, and all the nameless things of luxury which can make the breaking of bread a poem.

Reuben had seen something dimly resembling this in New York once or twice at semi-public dinners. The thought that this higher marvel was in his honor intoxicated his reason. The other thought—that conceivably his future might lie all in this flower-strewn, daintily lighted path—was too heady, too full of threatened delirium, to be even enter-

tained. With an anxious hold upon himself, he felt his way forward to self-possession. It came sooner than he had imagined it would, and thereafter everything belonged to a dream of delight.

The ladies were all dressed more elaborately than he had observed them to be on any previous occasion, and, at the outset, there was something disconcerting in this. Speedily enough, though, there came the reflection that his clothes were those in which he had raced breathlessly from the farm, in which he had faced and won the crowd outside, and then, all at once, he was at perfect ease.

He told them—addressing his talk chiefly to Mrs. Minster, who sat at the head of the table, to his left—the story of Jessica's ride, of her fainting on her arrival, and of the furious homeward drive. From this he drifted to the final proofs which had been procured at Cadmus—he had sent Gedney home with the horses, and was to see him early in the morning—and then to the steps toward a criminal prosecution which he would summarily take.

“So far as I can see, Mrs. Minster,” he concluded, when the servant had again left the room, “no real loss will result from this whole imbroglio. It may even show a net gain, when everything is cleared up; for your big loan must really give you control of the Thessaly Manufacturing Company, in law. These fellows staked their majority interest in that concern to win your whole property in the game. They have lost, and the proceeds must go to you. Of course, it is not entirely clear how the matter will

shape itself; but my notion is that you will come out winner."

Mrs. Minster smiled complacently. "My daughters thought that I knew nothing about business!" she said, with an air of easy triumph.

The daughters displayed great eagerness to leave this branch of the matter undiscussed.

"And will it really be necessary to prosecute these men?" asked Ethel, from Reuben's right.

The lawyer realized, even before he spoke, that not a little of his bitterness had evaporated. "Men ought to be punished for such a crime as they committed," he said. "If only as a duty to the public, they should be prosecuted."

He was looking at Kate as he spoke, and in her glance, as their eyes met, he read something which prompted him hastily to add:

"Of course, I am in your hands in the matter. I have committed myself with the crowd outside to the statement that they should be punished. I was full, then, of angry feelings; and I still think that they ought to be punished. But it is really your question, not mine. And I may even tell you that there would probably be a considerable financial advantage in settling the thing with them, instead of taking it before the grand jury."

"That is a consideration which we won't discuss," said Kate. "If my mind were clear as to the necessity of a prosecution, I would not alter the decision for any amount of money. But my sister and I have been talking a great deal about this matter, and we

feel— You know that Mr. Boyce was, for a time, on quite a friendly footing in this house.”

“Yes; I know.” Reuben bowed his head gravely.

“Well, you yourself said that if one was prosecuted, they all must be.”

“No doubt. Wendover and Tenney were smart enough to put the credulous youngster in the very forefront of everything. Until these affidavits came to hand to-day, it would have been far easier to convict him than them.”

“Precisely,” urged Kate. “Credulous is just the word. He was weak, foolish, vain—whatever you like. They led him into the thing. But I don’t believe that at the outset, or, indeed, till very recently, he had any idea of being a party to a plan to plunder us. There are reasons,” the girl blushed a little, and hesitated, “to be frank, there are reasons for my thinking so.”

Reuben, noting the faint flush of embarrassment, catching the doubtful inflection of the words, felt that he comprehended everything, and mirrored that feeling in his glance.

“I quite follow you,” he said. “It is my notion that he was deceived, at the beginning.”

“Others deceived him, and still more he deceived himself,” responded Kate.

“And that is why,” put in Ethel, “we feel like asking you not to take the matter into the courts—I mean so as to put him in prison. It would be too dreadful to think of—to take a man who had dined at your house, and been boating with you,

and had driven with you all over the Orange Mountains, picking wild-flowers for you and all that, and put him into prison, where he would have his hair shaved off, and tramp up and down on a treadmill. No; we mustn't do that, Mr. Tracy."

Kate added musingly: "He has lost so much, we can afford to be generous, can we not?"

Then Reuben felt that there could be no answer possible except "yes." His heart pleaded with his brain for a lover's interpretation of this speech; and his tongue, to evade the issue, framed some halting words about allowing him to go over the whole case to-morrow, and postponing a final decision until that had been done.

The consent of silence was accorded to this, and everybody at the table knew that there would be no prosecutions. Upon the instant the atmosphere grew lighter.

"And now for the real thing," said Kate, gayly. "I am commissioned on behalf of the entire family to formally thank you for coming to our rescue to-night. Mamma did not hear your speech—she resolutely sat in the library, pretending to read, during the whole rumpus, and we were in such a hurry to get up-stairs that we didn't tell her when you began—but she couldn't help hearing the horns, and she is as much obliged to you as we are; and that is very, very, *very* much indeed!"

"Yes, indeed," assented Mrs. Minster. "I don't know where the police were, at all."

"The police could have done next to nothing, if

they had been here," said Reuben. "The visit of the crowd was annoying enough, and discreditable in its way, but I don't really imagine there was ever any actual danger. The men felt disagreeable about the closing of the works and the importation of the French Canadians, and I don't blame them; but as a body they never had any idea of molesting you. My own notion is that the mob was organized by outsiders—by men who had an end to serve in frightening you—and that after the crowd got here it didn't know what to do with itself. The truth is, that the mob isn't an American institution. Its component parts are too civilized, too open to appeals to reason. As soon as I told these people the facts in the case, they were quite ready to go, and they even cheered for you before they went."

"Ethel tells me that you promised them the furnaces should be opened promptly," said the mother, with her calm, inquiring glance, which might mean sarcasm, anger, approval, or nothing at all.

Reuben answered resolutely: "Yes, Mrs. Minster, I did. And so they must be opened, on Monday. Let us be frank about the matter. It is my dearest wish that I should be able to act for you all in this whole business. But I have gone too far now, the interests involved are too great, to make a pause here possible. The very essence of the situation is that we should defy the trust, and throw upon it the *onus* of stopping us if it can. We have such a grip upon the men who led you into that trust, and who can influence the decisions of its directors, that

they will not dare to show fight. The force of circumstances has made me the custodian of your interests quite as much as of your daughters'. I am very proud and happy that it is so. It is true that I have not your warrant for acting in your behalf; but if you will permit me to say so, that cannot now be allowed to make the slightest difference in my action."

"Yes, mamma, you are to be rescued in spite of yourself," said Ethel, merrily.

The young people were all smiling at one another, and to their considerable relief Mrs. Minster concluded to smile also.

Nobody attempted to analyze the mental processes by which she had been brought around. It was enough that she had come to accept the situation. The black shadow of discord, which had overhung the household so long, was gone, and mother and daughters joined in a sigh of grateful relief.

It must have been nearly midnight when Reuben rose finally to go. There had been so much to talk about, and time had flown so softly, buoyantly along, that the evening seemed to him only to have begun, and he felt that he fain would have had it go on forever. These delicious hours that were past had been one sweet sustained conspiracy to do him honor, to minister to his pleasure. No word or smile or deferential glance of attention had been wanting to make complete the homage with which the family had chosen to envelop him. The sense of tender domestic intimacy had surcharged the very air he

breathed. It had not even been necessary to keep the ball of talk in motion : so well and truly did they know one another, that silences had come as natural rests—silences more eloquent than spoken words could be of mutual liking and trust. The outside world had shrunk to nothingness. Here within this charmed circle of softened light was home. All that the whole universe contained for him of beauty, of romance, of reverential desire, of happiness, here within touch it was centred. And it was all, all his !

The farewells that found their way into phrases left scarcely a mark upon his memory. There had been cordial, softly significant words of smiling leave-taking with Ethel and her mother, and then, divinely prompted by the spirit which ruled this blessed hour, they had gone away, and he stood alone in the hallway with the woman he worshipped. He held her hand in his, and there was no need for speech.

Slowly, devoutly, he bowed his head over this white hand, and pressed his lips upon it. There were tears in his eyes when he stood erect again, and through them he saw with dim rapture the marvel of an angel's face, pale, yet glowing in the half light, lovely beyond all mortal dreams ; and on this face there shone a smile, tender, languorous, trembling with the supreme ecstasy of a soul.

Were words spoken ? Reuben could hardly have told as he walked away down the path to the street. " Bless you ! bless you ! " was what the song-birds carolled in his brain ; but whether the music was an echo of what he had said, did not make itself clear.

He was scarcely conscious of the physical element of walking in his progress. Rather it seemed to him that his whole being was afloat in the ether, wafted forward by the halcyon winds of a beneficent destiny. Was there ever such unthinkable bliss before in all the vast span of the universe?

The snowfall had long since ceased, and the clouds were gone. The air was colder, and the broad sky was brilliant with the clear starlight of winter. To the lover's eyes, the great planets were nearer, strangely nearer, than they had ever been before, and the undying fire with which they burned was the same that glowed in his own heart. His senses linked themselves to the grand procession of the skies. The triumphant onward glide of the earth itself within this colossal scheme of movement was apparent to him, and seemed but a part of his own restless, glorified onward sweep. Oh, this—*this* was life!

At the same hour a heavy and lumpish man made his way homeward by a neighboring street, tramping with difficulty through the hardening snow which lay thick upon the walks. There was nothing buoyant in his stride, and he never once lifted his eyes to observe the luminous panorama spread overhead. With his hands plunged deep into his pockets, and his cane under his arm, he trudged moodily along, his shoulders rounded and his brows bent in a frown.

An acquaintance going in the other direction called out cheerily as he passed, "Hello, General! Pretty

tough walking, isn't it?" and had only an inarticulate grunt for an answer.

There were evil hints abroad in the village below, this night—stories of impending revelations of fraud, hints of coming prosecutions—and General Boyce had heard enough of these to grow sick at heart. That Horace had been deeply mixed up in something scoundrelly, seemed only too evident. Since this foolish, ungrateful boy had left the paternal roof, his father had surrendered himself more than ever to drink; but indulgence now, instead of the old brightening merriment of song and quip and pleasantly reminiscent camp-fire sparkle, seemed to swing him like a pendulum between the extremes of sullen wrath and almost tearful weakness. Something of both these moods weighted his mind to-night, and to their burden was added a crushingly gloomy apprehension that naked disgrace was coming as well. Precisely what it was, he knew not; but winks and nods and unnatural efforts to shift the conversation when he came in had been in the air about him all the evening. The very vagueness of the fear lent it fresh terror.

His own gate was reached at last, and he turned wearily into the path which encircled the small yard to reach the front door. He cursorily noted the existence of some partially obliterated footprints in the snow, and took it for granted that one of the servants had been out late.

He had begun fumbling in his pocket for the key, and had his foot on the lower step, before he dis-

covered in the dim light something which gave even his martial nerves a start. The dark-clad figure of a woman, obviously well dressed, apparently young, lay before him, the head and arms bent under against his very door.

The General was a man of swift decision and ready resource. In an instant he had lifted the figure up out of the snow which half enveloped it, and sustained it in one arm, while with the other he sent the reverberating clamor of the door-bell pealing through the house. Then, unlocking the door, he bore his burden lightly into the hall, turned up the gas, and disposed the inanimate form on a chair.

He did not know the woman, but it was evident that she was very ill—perhaps dying.

When the servant came down, he bade her run with all possible haste for Dr. Lester, who lived only a block or so away.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I TELL YOU I HAVE LIVED IT DOWN!"

INSTEAD of snow and cold and the black terror of being overwhelmed by stormy night, here were light and warmth and a curiously sleepy yet volatile sense of comfort.

Jessica's eyes for a long time rested tranquilly upon what seemed a gigantic rose hanging directly over her head. Her brain received no impression whatever as to why it was there, and there was not the slightest impulse to wonder or to think about it at all. Even when it finally began to descend nearer, and to expand and unfold pale pink leaves, still it was satisfying not to have to make any effort toward understanding it. The transformation went on with infinite slowness before her vacantly contented vision. Upon all sides the outer leaves gradually, little by little, stretched themselves downward, still downward, until they enveloped her as in the bell of some huge inverted lily. Indefinite spaces of time intervened, and then it became vaguely apparent that faint designs of other, smaller flowers were scattered over these large environing leaves, and that a soft, ruddy light came through them. With measured deliberation, as if all eternity were at its disposal, this

vast floral cone revealed itself at last to her dim consciousness as being made of some thin, figured cloth. It seemed weeks—months—before she further comprehended that the rose above her was the embroidered centre of a canopy, and that the leaves depending from it in long, graceful curves about her were bed-curtains.

After a time she found herself lifting her hand upright and looking at it. It was wan and white like wax, as if it did not belong to her at all. From the wrist there was turned back the delicately quilted cuff of a man's silk night-shirt. She raised the arm in its novel silken sleeve, and thrust it forward with some unformed notion that it would prove not to be hers. The action pushed aside the curtains, and a glare of light flashed in, under which she shut her eyes and gasped.

When she looked again, an elderly, broad-figured man with a florid face was standing close beside the bed, gazing with anxiety upon her. She knew that it was General Boyce, and for a long time was not surprised that he should be there. The capacity for wondering, for thinking about things, seemed not to exist in her brain. She looked at him calmly and did not dream of speaking.

"Are you better?" she heard him eagerly whisper. "Are you in pain?"

The complex difficulty of two questions which required separate answers troubled her remotely. She made some faint nodding motion of her head and eyes, and then lay perfectly still again. She

could hear the sound of her own breathing—a hoarse, sighing sound, as if of blowing through a comb—and, now that it was suggested to her, there was a deadened heavy ache in her breast.

Still placidly surveying the General, she began to be conscious of remembering things. The pictures came slowly, taking form with a fantastic absence of consecutive meaning, but they gradually produced the effect of a recollection upon her mind. The starting point—and everything else that went before that terrible sinking, despairing struggle through the wet snow—was missing. She recalled most vividly of all being seized with a sudden crisis of swimming giddiness and choking—her throat and chest all afire with the tortures of suffocation. It was under a lamp-post, she remembered; and when the vehement coughing was over, her mouth was full of blood, and there were terrifying crimson spatters on the snow. She had stood aghast at this, and then fallen to weeping piteously to herself with fright. How strange it was—in the anguish of that moment she had moaned out, “O mother, mother!” and yet she had never seen that parent, and had scarcely thought of her memory even for many, many years.

Then she had blindly staggered on, sinking more than once from sheer exhaustion, but still forcing herself forward, her wet feet weighing like leaden balls, and fierce agonies clutching her very heart. She had fallen in the snow at the very end of her journey; had dragged herself laboriously, painfully, up on to the steps, and had beaten feebly on the panels of the

door with her numbed hands, making an inarticulate moan which not all her desperate last effort could lift into a cry; and then there had come, with a great downward swoop of skies and storm, utter blackness and collapse.

She closed her eyes now in the weariness which this effort at recollection had caused. Her senses wandered off, unbidden, unguided, to a dream of the buzzing of a bee upon a window-pane, which was somehow like the stertorous sound of her own breathing.

The bee—a big, loud, foolish fellow, with yellow fur upon his broad back and thighs—had flown into the schoolroom, and had not wit enough to go out again. Some of the children were giggling over this, but she would not join them because Mr. Tracy, the schoolmaster upon the platform, did not wish it. She wanted very much to please him. Already she delighted in the hope that he liked her better than he did some of the other girls—scornful girls who came from wealthy homes, and wore better dresses than any of the despised Lawton brood could ever hope to have.

Silk dresses, opened boldly at the throat, and with long trains tricked out with imitation garlands. They were worn now by older girls—hard-faced, jealous, cruel creatures—and these sat in a room with lace curtains and luxurious furniture. And some laughed with a ring like brass in their voices, and some wept furtively in corners, and some cursed their God and all living things; and there was the odor of wine

and the uproar of the piano, and over all a great, ceaseless shame and terror.

Escape from this should be made at all hazards; and the long, incredibly fearful flight, with pursuit always pressing hot upon her, the evil fangs of the wolf-pack snapping in the air all about her frightened ears, led to a peaceful, soft-carpeted forest, where the low setting sun spread a red light among the big tree-trunks. Against this deep, far-distant sky there was the figure of a man coming. For him she waited with a song in her heart. Did she not know him? It was Reuben Tracy, and he was too gentle and good not to see her when he passed. She would call out to him—and lo! she could not.

Horace was with her, and held her hand; and they both gazed with terrified longing after Tracy, and could not cry out to him for the awful dumbness that was on them. And when he, refusing to see them, spread out his arms in anger, the whole great forest began to sway and circle dizzily, and huge trees toppled, rocks crashed downward, gaunt giant reptiles rose from yawning caves with hideous slimy eyes in a lurid ring about her. And she would save Horace with her life, and fought like mad, bleeding and maimed and frenzied, until the weight of mountains piled upon her breast held her down in helpless, choking horror. Then only came the power to scream, and—

Out of the roar of confusion and darkness came suddenly a hush and the return of light. She was

lying in the curtained bed, and a tender hand was pressing soft cool linen to her lips.

Opening her eyes in tranquil weakness, she saw two men standing at her bedside. He who held the cloth in his hand was Dr. Lester, whom she remembered very well. The other—he whose head was bowed, and whose eyes were fastened upon hers with a pained and affrighted gaze—was Horace Boyce.

In her soul she smiled at him, but no answering softness came to his harrowed face.

"I told your father everything," she heard the doctor say in a low tone. "I recognized her on the instant. I happened to have attended her, by the merest chance, when her child was born."

"Her child?" the other asked, in the same low, far-away voice.

"Yes—and your child. He is in Thessaly now, a boy nearly six years old."

"Good God! I never knew—"

"You seem to have taken precious good care not to know," said the doctor, with grave dislike. "This is the time and place to speak plainly to you, Boyce. This poor girl has come to her death through the effort to save you from disgrace. She supposed you lived here, and dragged herself here to help you."

Jessica heard the sentence of doom without even a passing thought. Every energy left in her feebly fluttering brain was concentrated upon the question, *Is he saved?* Vaguely the circumstances of the papers, of the threats against Horace, of her

desires and actions, seemed to come back to her memory. She waited in dazed suspense to hear what Horace would say; but he only hung his head the lower, and left the doctor to go on.

"She raved for hours last night," he said, "after the women had got her to bed, and we had raised her out of the comatose state, about saving you from State prison. First she would plead with Tracy, then she would appeal to you to fly, and so backwards and forwards, until she wore herself out. The papers she had got hold of—they must have slipped out of Gedney's pocket into the sleigh. I suppose you know that I took them back to Tracy this morning?"

Still Horace made no answer, but bent that crushed and vacant gaze upon her face. She marvelled that he could not see she was awake and conscious, and still more that the strength and will to speak were withheld from her. The dreadful pressure upon her breast was making itself felt again, and the painful sound of the labored breathing took on the sombre rhythm of a distant death-chant. Oh, would he never speak! No: still the doctor went on:

"Tracy will be here in a few minutes. He's terribly upset by the thing, and has gone first to tell the news at the Minsters'. Do you want to see him when he comes?"

"I don't know what I want," said Horace, gloomily.

"If I were you, I would go straight to him and

say frankly, 'I have been a damned fool, and a still damner hypocrite, and I throw myself on your mercy.' He's the tenderest-hearted man alive, and this sight here will move him. Upon my word, I can hardly keep the tears out of my eyes myself."

Jessica saw as through a mist that these two men's faces, turned upon her, were softened with a deep compassion. Then suddenly the power to speak came to her. It was a puny and unnatural voice which fell upon her ears—low and hoarsely grating, and the product of much pain.

"Go away—doctor," she murmured. "Leave him here."

Horace sat softly upon the edge of the bed, and gathered her two hands tenderly in his. He did not attempt to keep back the tears which welled to his eyes, nor did he try to talk. Thus they were together for what seemed a long time, surrounded by a silence which was full of voices to them both. A wan smile settled upon her face as she held him in her intent gaze.

"Take the boy," she whispered at last; "he is Horace, too. Don't let him lie—ever—to any girl."

The young man groaned in spite of himself, and for answer gently pressed her hands. "I promise you that, Jess," he said, after a time, in a broken voice. He bent over and kissed her on the forehead. The damp roughness of the skin chilled and terrified him, but the radiance on her face deepened.

"It hurts—to breathe," she said, after a time, with a glance of affectionate apology in her smile.

Subdued noises were faintly heard now in the hallway outside, and presently the door was opened cautiously, and a tall new figure entered the room. After a moment's hesitation Reuben Tracy tiptoed his way to the bedside, and stood gravely behind and above his former partner.

"Is she conscious?" he asked of Boyce, in a tremulous whisper; and Horace, bending his head still lower, murmured between choking sobs: "It is Mr. Tracy, Jess, come to say—to see you."

Her eyes brightened with intelligence. "Good—good," she said, slowly, as if musing to herself. The gaze which she fastened upon Reuben's face was strangely full of intense meaning, and he felt it piercing his very heart. Minutes went by under the strain of this deep, half-wild, appealing look. At last she spoke, with a greater effort at distinctness than before, and in a momentarily clearer tone.

"You were always kind," she said. "Don't hurt—my boy. Shake hands with him—for my sake."

The two young men obeyed mechanically, after an instant's pause, and without looking at each other. Neither had eyes save for the white face on the pillows in front of them, and for the gladdened, restful light which spread softly over it as their hands touched in amity before her vision.

Now she seemed no longer to see them.

In the languor of peace which had come to possess her, even the sense of pain in breathing was gone. There were shadowy figures on the retina of her brain, but they conveyed no idea save of general

beatitude to her mind. The space in which her senses floated was radiant and warm and full of formless beauty. Various individuals—types of her loosening ties to life—came and went almost unheeded in this daze.

Lucinda, vehemently weeping, and holding the little fair-haired, wondering boy over the bed for her final kiss, passed away like a dissolving mist. Her father's face, too, dawned upon this dream, tear-stained and woful, and faded again into nothingness. Other flitting apparitions there were, even more vague and brief, melting noiselessly into the darkened hush.

The unclouded calm of this lethargy grew troubled presently when there fell upon her dulled ear the low tones of a remembered woman's voice. Enough of consciousness flickered up to tell her whose it was. She strained her eyes in the gathering shadows to see Kate Minster, and began restlessly to roll her head upon the pillow.

"Where—where—*her?*" she moaned, striving to stretch forth her hand.

It was lifted and held softly in a tender grasp, and she felt as well a compassionate stroking touch laid upon her forehead. The gentle magnetism of these helped the dying girl to bring into momentary being the image of a countenance close above hers—a dark, beautiful face, all melting now with affection and grief. She smiled faintly into this face, and lay still again for a long time. The breathing grew terribly shorter and more labored, the light faded

The Lawton Girl
by
Harold Frederic

